THE POETICAL WORKS

OF

THOMAS HARDY

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

COLLECTED POEMS

LYRICAL, NARRATORY, AND REFLECTIVE



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

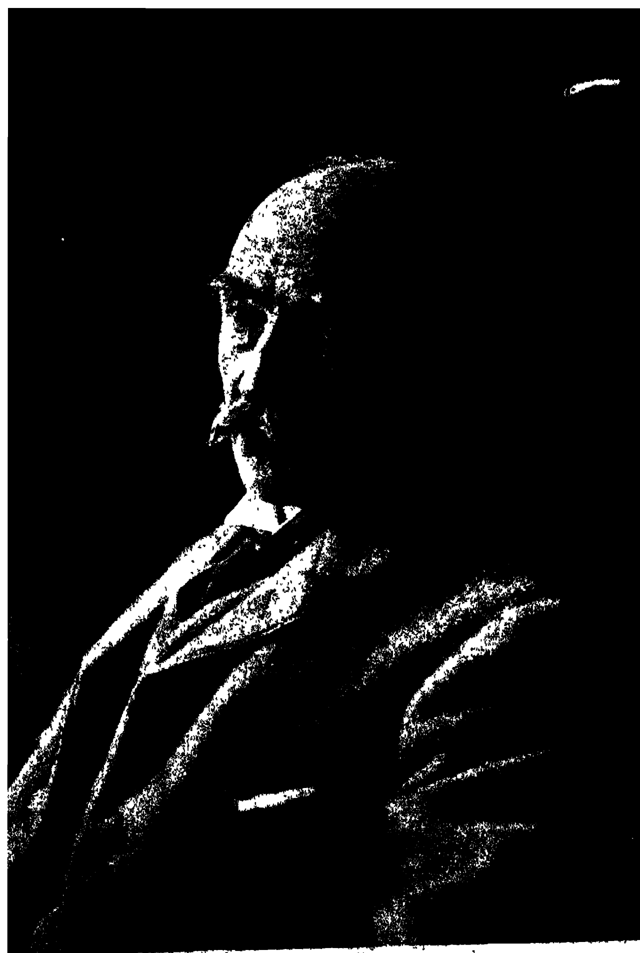
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TORONTO



Thomas Hardy

COLLECTED POEMS

OF

THOMAS HARDY



WITH A PORTRAIT

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WESSEX POEMS

AND OTHER VERSES

PREFACE

Of the miscellaneous collection of verse that follows, only four pieces have been published, though many were written long ago, and others partly written. In some few cases the verses were turned into prose and printed as such, it having been unanticipated at that time that they might see the light.

Whenever an ancient and legitimate word of the district, for which there was no equivalent in received English, suggested itself as the most natural, nearest, and often only expression of a thought, it has been made use of, on what seemed good grounds.

The pieces are in a large degree dramatic or personative in conception; and this even where they are not obviously so.

The dates attached to some of the poems do not apply to the rough sketches given in illustration,[1] which have been recently made, and, as may be surmised, are inserted for personal and local reasons rather than for their intrinsic qualities.

T. H.

[1] The early editions were illustrated by the writer.

September 1898.

THE TEMPORARY THE ALL

CHANGE and chancefulness in my flowering youthtime,
Set me sun by sun near to one unchosen;
Wrought us fellowlike, and despite divergence
Fused us in friendship.

"Cherish him can I while the true one forthcome—
Come the rich fulfiller of my prevision;
Life is roomy yet, and the odds unbounded."
So self-communed I.

Thwart my wistful way did a damsel saunter,
Fair, albeit unformed to be all-eclipsing;
"Maiden meet," held I, "till arise my forefelt
Wonder of women."

Long a visioned hermitage deep desiring,
Tenements uncouth I was fain to house in;
"Let such lodging be for a breath-while," thought I,
"Soon a more seemly.

"Then, high handiwork will I make my life-deed,
Truth and Light outshow; but the ripe time pending,
Intermissive aim at the thing sufficeth."
Thus I. . . . But lo, me!

Mistress, friend, place, aims to be bettered straightway,
Bettered not has Fate or my hand's achievement;
Sole the showings those of my onward earthtrack—
Never transcended!

AMABEL

I MARKED her ruined hues,
Her custom-straitened views,
And asked, "Can there indwell
My Amabel?"

I looked upon her gown,
Once rose, now earthen brown;
The change was like the knell
Of Amabel.

Her step's mechanic ways
Had lost the life of May's;
Her laugh, once sweet in swell,
Spoilt Amabel.

I mused: "Who sings the strain
I sang ere warmth did wane?
Who thinks its numbers spell
His Amabel?"—

Knowing that, though Love cease,
Love's race shows no decrease;
All find in dorp or dell
An Amabel.

—I felt that I could creep
To some housetop, and weep
That Time the tyrant fell
Ruled Amabel!

I said (the while I sighed
That love like ours had died),
"Fond things I'll no more tell
To Amabel,

"But leave her to her fate,
And fling across the gate,
'Till the Last Trump, farewell,
O Amabel!'"

1865.

HAP

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

1866.

"IN VISION I ROAMED"

TO

In vision I roamed the flashing Firmament,
So fierce in blazon that the Night waxed wan,
As though with awe at orbs of such ostént;
And as I thought my spirit ranged on and on

In footless traverse through ghast heights of sky,
To the last chambers of the monstrous Dome,
Where stars the brightest here are lost to the eye:
Then, any spot on our own Earth seemed Home!

And the sick grief that you were far away
Grew pleasant thankfulness that you were near,
Who might have been, set on some foreign Sphere,
Less than a Want to me, as day by day
I lived unware, uncaring all that lay
Locked in that Universe taciturn and drear.

1866.

AT A BRIDAL

NATURE'S INDIFFERENCE

WHEN you paced forth, to await maternity,
A dream of other offspring held my mind,
Compounded of us twain as Love designed;
Rare forms, that corporate now will never be!

Should I, too, wed as slave to Mode's decree,
And each thus found apart, of false desire,
A stolid line, whom no high aims will fire
As had fired ours could ever have mingled we;

And, grieved that lives so matched should miscompose,
Each mourn the double waste; and question dare
To the Great Dame whence incarnation flows,
Why those high-purposed children never were:
What will she answer? That she does not care
If the race all such sovereign types unknows.

1866.

POSTPONEMENT

SNOW-BOUND in woodland, a mournful word,
Dropt now and then from the bill of a bird,
Reached me on wind-wafts; and thus I heard,
Wearily waiting:—

"I planned her a nest in a leafless tree,
But the passers eyed and twitted me,
And said: 'How reckless a bird is he,
Cheerily mating!'

"Fear-filled, I stayed me till summer-tide,
In lewth of leaves to throne her bride;
But alas! her love for me waned and died,
Wearily waiting.

"Ah, had I been like some I see,
Born to an evergreen nesting-tree,
None had eyed and twitted me,
Cheerily mating!"

1866.

A CONFESSION TO A FRIEND IN TROUBLE

YOUR troubles shrink not, though I feel them less
Here, far away, than when I tarried near;
I even smile old smiles—with listlessness—
Yet smiles they are, not ghastly mockeries mere.

A thought too strange to house within my brain
Haunting its outer precincts I discern:
—*That I will not show zeal again to learn*
Your griefs, and, sharing them, renew my pain. . . .

It goes, like murky bird or buccaneer
That shapes its lawless figure on the main,
And each new impulse tends to make outflee
The unseemly instinct that had lodgment here;
Yet, comrade old, can bitterer knowledge be
Than that, though banned, such instinct was in me!

1866.

NEUTRAL TONES

WE stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
—They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles solved years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing. . . .

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

1867.

SHE

AT HIS FUNERAL

THEY bear him to his resting-place—
In slow procession sweeping by;
I follow at a stranger's space;
His kindred they, his sweetheart I.
Unchanged my gown of garish dye,
Though sable-sad is their attire;
But they stand round with griefless eye,
Whilst my regret consumes like fire!

187–.

HER INITIALS

UPON a poet's page I wrote
Of old two letters of her name;
Part seemed she of the effulgent thought
Whence that high singer's rapture came.
—When now I turn the leaf the same
Immortal light illumes the lay,
But from the letters of her name
The radiance has waned away!

1869.

HER DILEMMA

(IN —— CHURCH)

THE two were silent in a sunless church,
Whose mildewed walls, uneven paving-stones,
And wasted carvings passed antique research;
And nothing broke the clock's dull monotones.

Leaning against a wormy poppy-head,
So wan and worn that he could scarcely stand,
—For he was soon to die,—he softly said,
"Tell me you love me!"—holding long her hand.

She would have given a world to breathe "yes" truly,
So much his life seemed hanging on her mind,
And hence she lied, her heart persuaded throughly
'Twas worth her soul to be a moment kind.

But the sad need thereof, his nearing death,
So mocked humanity that she shamed to prize
A world conditioned thus, or care for breath
Where Nature such dilemmas could devise.

1866.

REVULSION

THOUGH I waste watches framing words to fetter
Some unknown spirit to mine in clasp and kiss,
Out of the night there looms a sense 'twere better
To fail obtaining whom one fails to miss.

For winning love we win the risk of losing,
And losing love is as one's life were riven;
It cuts like contumely and keen ill-using
To cede what was superfluously given.

Let me then never feel the fateful thrilling
That devastates the love-worn wooer's frame,
The hot ado of fevered hopes, the chilling
That agonizes disappointed aim!
So may I live no junctive law fulfilling,
And my heart's table bear no woman's name.

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

I

WHEN you shall see me in the toils of Time,
My lauded beauties carried off from me,
My eyes no longer stars as in their prime,
My name forgot of Maiden Fair and Free;

When, in your being, heart concedes to mind,
And judgment, though you scarce its process know,
Recalls the excellencies I once enshrined,
And you are irked that they have withered so:

Remembering mine the loss is, not the blame,
That Sportsman Time but rears his brood to kill,
Knowing me in my soul the very same—
One who would die to spare you touch of ill!—
Will you not grant to old affection's claim
The hand of friendship down Life's sunless hill?

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

II

PERHAPS, long hence, when I have passed away,
Some other's feature, accent, thought like mine,
Will carry you back to what I used to say,
And bring some memory of your love's decline.

Then you may pause awhile and think, "Poor jade!"
And yield a sigh to me—as ample due,
Not as the tittle of a debt unpaid
To one who could resign her all to you—

And thus reflecting, you will never see
That your thin thought, in two small words conveyed,
Was no such fleeting phantom-thought to me,
But the Whole Life wherein my part was played;
And you amid its fitful masquerade
A Thought—as I in your life seem to be!

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

III

I WILL be faithful to thee; aye, I will!
And Death shall choose me with a wondering eye
That he did not discern and domicile
One his by right ever since that last Good-bye!

I have no care for friends, or kin, or prime
Of manhood who deal gently with me here;
Amid the happy people of my time
Who work their love's fulfilment, I appear

Numb as a vane that cankers on its point,
True to the wind that kissed ere canker came:
Despised by souls of Now, who would disjoint
The mind from memory, making Life all aim.

My old dexterities in witchery gone,
And nothing left for Love to look upon.

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

IV

THIS love puts all humanity from me;
I can but maledict her, pray her dead,
For giving love and getting love of thee—
Feeding a heart that else mine own had fed!

How much I love I know not, life not known,
Save as one unit I would add love by;
But this I know, my being is but thine own—
Fused from its separateness by ecstasy.

And thus I grasp thy amplitudes, of her
Ungrasped, though helped by nigh-regarding eyes;
Canst thou then hate me as an envier
Who see unrecked what I so dearly prize?
Believe me, Lost One, Love is lovelier
The more it shapes its moan in selfish-wise.

1866.

DITTY

(E. L. G.)

BENEATH a knap where flown
Nestlings play,
Within walls of weathered stone,
Far away
From the files of formal houses,
By the bough the firstling browses,
Lives a Sweet: no merchants meet,
No man barters, no man sells
Where she dwells.

Upon that fabric fair
"Here is she!"
Seems written everywhere
Unto me.
But to friends and nodding neighbours,
Fellow-wights in lot and labours,
Who descry the times as I,
No such lucid legend tells
Where she dwells.

Should I lapse to what I was
Ere we met;
(Such will not be, but because
Some forget
Let me feign it)—none would notice
That where she I know by rote is
Spread a strange and withering change,
Like a drying of the wells
Where she dwells.

To feel I might have kissed—
Loved as true—
Otherwhere, nor Mine have missed
My life through,
Had I never wandered near her,
Is a smart severe—severer
In the thought that she is nought,
Even as I, beyond the dells
Where she dwells.

And Devotion droops her glance
To recall
What bond-servants of Chance
We are all.
I but found her in that, going
On my errant path unknowing,
I did not out-skirt the spot
That no spot on earth excels,
—Where she dwells!

1870.

THE SERGEANT'S SONG

(1803)

WHEN Lawyers strive to heal a breach,
And Parsons practise what they preach;
Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lorum,
Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay!

When Justices hold equal scales,
And Rogues are only found in jails;
Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, &c.

When Rich Men find their wealth a curse,
And fill therewith the Poor Man's purse;
Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, &c.

When Husbands with their Wives agree,
And Maids won't wed from modesty;
Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, tol-tol-lorum,
Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay!

1878.

Published in "The Trumpet-Major" 1880.

VALENCIENNES

(1793)

BY CORP'L TULLIDGE, in "*The Trumpet Major*"

IN MEMORY OF S. C. (PENSIONER). DIED 184–

WE trenched, we trumpeted and drummed,
And from our mortars tons of iron hummed
Ath'art the ditch, the month we bombed
The Town o' Valencieën.

'Twas in the June o' Ninety-dree
(The Duke o' Yark our then Commander beën)
The German Legion, Guards, and we
Laid siege to Valencieën.

This was the first time in the war
That French and English spilled each other's gore;
—Few dreamt how far would roll the roar
Begun at Valencieën!

'Twas said that we'd no business there
A-topperèn the French for disagreën;
However, that's not my affair—
We were at Valencieën.

Such snocks and slats, since war began
Never knew raw recruit or veteràn:
Stone-deaf therence went many a man
Who served at Valencieën.

Into the streets, ath'art the sky,
A hundred thousand balls and bombs were fleën;
And harmless townsfolk fell to die
Each hour at Valencieën!

And, sweatèn wi' the bombardiers,
A shell was slent to shards anighst my ears:
—'Twas nigh the end of hopes and fears
For me at Valencieën!

They bore my wownded frame to camp,
And shut my gapèn skull, and washed en cleän,
And jined en wi' a zilver clamp
Thik night at Valencieën.

"We've fetched en back to quick from dead;
But never more on earth while rose is red
Will drum rouse Corpel!" Doctor said
O' me at Valencieën.

Twer true. No voice o' friend or foe
Can reach me now, or any livèn beën;
And little have I power to know
Since then at Valencieën!

I never hear the zummer hums
O' bees; and don' know when the cuckoo comes;
But night and day I hear the bombs
We threw at Valencieën. . . .

As for the Duke o' Yark in war,
There may be volk whose judgment o' en is meän;
But this I say—he was not far
From great at Valencieën.

O' wild wet nights, when all seems sad,
My wownds come back, as though new wownds I'd had;
But yet—at times I'm sort o' glad
I fout at Valencieen.

Well: Heaven wi' its jasper halls
Is now the on'y Town I care to be in. . . .
Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls
As we did Valencieën!

1878-1897.

SAN SEBASTIAN

(*August* 1813)

WITH THOUGHTS OF SERGEANT M—— (PENSIONER), WHO DIED 185-

"WHY, Sergeant, stray on the Ivel Way,
As though at home there were spectres rife?
From first to last 'twas a proud career!
And your sunny years with a gracious wife
Have brought you a daughter dear.

"I watched her to-day; a more comely maid,
As she danced in her muslin bowed with blue,
Round a Hintock maypole never gayed."
—"Aye, aye; I watched her this day, too,
As it happens," the Sergeant said.

"My daughter is now," he again began,
"Of just such an age as one I knew
When we of the Line, the Forlorn-hope van,
On an August morning—a chosen few—
Stormed San Sebastian.

"She's a score less three; so about was *she*—
The maiden I wronged in Peninsular days. . . .
You may prate of your prowess in lusty times,
But as years gnaw inward you blink your bays,
    And see too well your crimes!

"We'd stormed it at night, by the flapping light
Of burning towers, and the mortar's boom:
We'd topped the breach; but had failed to stay,
For our files were misled by the baffling gloom;
    And we said we'd storm by day.

"So, out of the trenches, with features set,
On that hot, still morning, in measured pace,
Our column climbed; climbed higher yet,
Past the fauss'bray, scarp, up the curtain-face,
    And along the parapet.

"From the batteried hornwork the cannoneers
Hove crashing balls of iron fire;
On the shaking gap mount the volunteers
In files, and as they mount expire
    Amid curses, groans, and cheers.

"Five hours did we storm, five hours re-form,
As Death cooled those hot blood pricked on;
Till our cause was helped by a woe within:
They were blown from the summit we'd leapt upon,
    And madly we entered in.

"On end for plunder, 'mid rain and thunder
That burst with the lull of our cannonade,
We vamped the streets in the stifling air—
Our hunger unsoothed, our thirst unstayed—
    And ransacked the buildings there.

"From the shady vaults of their walls of white
We rolled rich puncheons of Spanish grape,
Till at length, with the fire of the wine alight,
I saw at a doorway a fair fresh shape—
    A woman, a sylph, or sprite.

"Afeard she fled, and with heated head
I pursued to the chamber she called her own;
—When might is right no qualms deter,
And having her helpless and alone
I wreaked my will on her.

"She raised her beseeching eyes to me,
And I heard the words of prayer she sent
In her own soft language. . . . Fatefully
I copied those eyes for my punishment
In begetting the girl you see!

"So, to-day I stand with a God-set brand
Like Cain's, when he wandered from kindred's ken. . . .
I served through the war that made Europe free;
I wived me in peace-year. But, hid from men,
I bear that mark on me.

"Maybe we shape our offspring's guise
From fancy, or we know not what,
And that no deep impression dies,—
For the mother of my child is not
The mother of her eyes.

"And I nightly stray on the Ivel Way
As though at home there were spectres rife;
I delight me not in my proud career;
And 'tis coals of fire that a gracious wife
Should have brought me a daughter dear!"

THE STRANGER'S SONG

(*As sung by* MR. CHARLES CHARRINGTON *in the play of "The Three Wayfarers"*)

O MY trade it is the rarest one,
Simple shepherds all—
My trade is a sight to see;
For my customers I tie, and take 'em up on high,
And waft 'em to a far countree!

My tools are but common ones,
Simple shepherds all—
My tools are no sight to see:
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
Are implements enough for me!

To-morrow is my working day,
Simple shepherds all—
To-morrow is a working day for me:
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en,
And on his soul may God ha' mer-cy!

Printed in "The Three Strangers," 1883.

THE BURGHERS

(17—)

The sun had wheeled from Grey's to Dammer's Crest,
And still I mused on that Thing imminent:
At length I sought the High-street to the West.

The level flare raked pane and pediment
And my wrecked face, and shaped my nearing friend
Like one of those the Furnace held unshent.

"I've news concerning her," he said. "Attend.
They fly to-night at the late moon's first gleam:
Watch with thy steel: two righteous thrusts will end

Her shameless visions and his passioned dream.
I'll watch with thee, to testify thy wrong—
To aid, maybe.—Law consecrates the scheme."

I started, and we paced the flags along
Till I replied: "Since it has come to this
I'll do it! But alone. I can be strong."

Three hours past Curfew, when the Froom's mild hiss
Reigned sole, undulled by whirr of merchandize,
From Pummery-Tout to where the Gibbet is,

I crossed my pleasaunce hard by Glyd'path Rise,
And stood beneath the wall. Eleven strokes went,
And to the door they came, contrariwise,

And met in clasp so close I had but bent
My lifted blade on either to have let
Their two souls loose upon the firmament.

But something held my arm. "A moment yet
As pray-time ere you wantons die!" I said;
And then they saw me. Swift her gaze was set

With eye and cry of love illimited
Upon her Heart-king. Never upon me
Had she thrown look of love so thoroughsped! . . .

At once she flung her faint form shieldingly
On his, against the vengeance of my vows;
The which o'erruling, her shape shielded he.

Blanked by such love, I stood as in a drowse,
And the slow moon edged from the upland nigh,
My sad thoughts moving thuswise: "I may house

And I may husband her, yet what am I
But licensed tyrant to this bonded pair?
Says Charity, Do as ye would be done by." . . .

Hurling my iron to the bushes there,
I bade them stay. And, as if brain and breast
Were passive, they walked with me to the stair.

Inside the house none watched; and on we prest
Before a mirror, in whose gleam I read
Her beauty, his—and mine own mien unblest;

Till at her room I turned. "Madam," I said,
"Have you the wherewithal for this? Pray speak.
Love fills no cupboard. You'll need daily bread."

"We've nothing, sire," she lipped; "and nothing seek.
'Twere base in me to rob my lord unware;
Our hands will earn a pittance week by week."

And next I saw she had piled her raiment rare
Within the garde-robes, and her household purse,
Her jewels, her least lace of personal wear;

And stood in homespun. Now grown wholly hers,
I handed her the gold, her jewels all,
And him the choicest of her robes diverse.

"I'll take you to the doorway in the wall,
And then adieu," I told them. "Friends, withdraw."
They did so; and she went—beyond recall.

And as I paused beneath the arch I saw
Their moonlit figures—slow, as in surprise—
Descend the slope, and vanish on the haw.

"'Fool,' some will say," I thought.—"But who is wise,
Save God alone, to weigh my reasons why?"
—"Hast thou struck home?" came with the boughs' night-sighs.

It was my friend. "I have struck well. They fly,
But carry wounds that none can cicatrize."
—"Mortal?" said he. "Remorseful—worse," said I.

LEIPZIG

(1813)

SCENE.—*The Master-tradesmen's Parlour at the Old Ship Inn, Casterbridge. Evening.*

"OLD Norbert with the flat blue cap—
  A German said to be—
Why let your pipe die on your lap,
  Your eyes blink absently?"

—"Ah! . . . Well, I had thought till my cheek was wet
  Of my mother—her voice and mien
When she used to sing and pirouette,
  And tap the tambourine

"To the march that yon street-fiddler plies:
  She told me 'twas the same
She'd heard from the trumpets, when the Allies
  Burst on her home like flame.

"My father was one of the German Hussars,
My mother of Leipzig; but he,
Being quartered here, fetched her at close of the wars,
And a Wessex lad reared me.

"And as I grew up, again and again
She'd tell, after trilling that air,
Of her youth, and the battles on Leipzig plain
And of all that was suffered there! . . .

"—'Twas a time of alarms. Three Chiefs-at-arms
Combined them to crush One,
And by numbers' might, for in equal fight
He stood the matched of none.

"Carl Schwarzenberg was of the plot,
And Blücher, prompt and prow,
And Jean the Crown-Prince Bernadotte:
Buonaparte was the foe.

"City and plain had felt his reign
From the North to the Middle Sea,
And he'd now sat down in the noble town
Of the King of Saxony.

"October's deep dew its wet gossamer threw
Upon Leipzig's lawns, leaf-strewn,
Where lately each fair avenue
Wrought shade for summer noon.

"To westward two dull rivers crept
Through miles of marsh and slough,
Whereover a streak of whiteness swept—
The Bridge of Lindenau.

"Hard by, in the City, the One, care-tossed,
Sat pondering his shrunken power;
And without the walls the hemming host
Waxed denser every hour.

"He had speech that night on the morrow's designs
With his chiefs by the bivouac fire,
While the belt of flames from the enemy's lines
Flared nigher him yet and nigher.

"Three sky-lights then from the girdling trine
Told, 'Ready!' As they rose
Their flashes seemed his Judgment-Sign
For bleeding Europe's woes.

"'Twas seen how the French watch-fires that night
Glowed still and steadily;
And the Three rejoiced, for they read in the sight
That the One disdained to flee. . . .

"—Five hundred guns began the affray
On next day morn at nine;
Such mad and mangling cannon-play
Had never torn human line.

"Around the town three battles beat,
Contracting like a gin;
As nearer marched the million feet
Of columns closing in.

"The first battle nighed on the low Southern side;
The second by the Western way;
The nearing of the third on the North was heard;
—The French held all at bay.

"Against the first band did the Emperor stand;
Against the second stood Ney;
Marmont against the third gave the order-word:
—Thus raged it throughout the day.

"Fifty thousand sturdy souls on those trampled plains and knolls,
Who met the dawn hopefully,
And were lotted their shares in a quarrel not theirs,
Dropt then in their agony.

"'O,' the old folks said, 'ye Preachers stern!
O so-called Christian time!
When will men's swords to ploughshares turn?
When come the promised prime?' . . .

"—The clash of horse and man which that day began,
Closed not as evening wore;
And the morrow's armies, rear and van,
Still mustered more and more.

"From the City towers the Confederate Powers
Were eyed in glittering lines,
And up from the vast a murmuring passed
As from a wood of pines.

"'Tis well to cover a feeble skill
By numbers' might!' scoffed He;
'But give me a third of their strength, I'd fill
Half Hell with their soldiery!'

"All that day raged the war they waged,
And again dumb night held reign,
Save that ever upspread from the dank deathbed
A miles-wide pant of pain.

"Hard had striven brave Ney, the true Bertrand,
Victor, and Augereau,
Bold Poniatowski, and Lauriston,
To stay their overthrow;

"But, as in the dream of one sick to death
There comes a narrowing room
That pens him, body and limbs and breath,
To wait a hideous doom,

"So to Napoleon, in the hush
That held the town and towers
Through these dire nights, a creeping crush
Seemed borne in with the hours.

"One road to the rearward, and but one,
Did fitful Chance allow;
'Twas where the Pleiss' and Elster run—
The Bridge of Lindenau.

"The nineteenth dawned. Down street and Platz
The wasted French sank back,
Stretching long lines across the Flats
And on the bridgeway track:

"When there surged on the sky an earthen wave,
And stones, and men, as though
Some rebel churchyard crew updrave
Their sepulchres from below.

"To Heaven is blown Bridge Lindenau;
Wrecked regiments reel therefrom;
And rank and file in masses plough
The sullen Elster-Strom.

"A gulf was Lindenau; and dead
Were fifties, hundreds, tens;
And every current rippled red
With Marshal's blood and men's.

"The smart Macdonald swam therein,
And barely won the verge;
Bold Poniatowski plunged him in
Never to re-emerge.

"Then stayed the strife. The remnants wound
Their Rhineward way pell-mell;
And thus did Leipzig City sound
An Empire's passing bell;

"While in cavalcade, with band and blade,
Came Marshals, Princes, Kings;
And the town was theirs. . . . Ay, as simple maid,
My mother saw these things!

"And whenever those notes in the street begin,
I recall her, and that far scene,
And her acting of how the Allies marched in,
And her tap of the tambourine!"

THE PEASANT'S CONFESSION

"Si le maréchal Grouchy avait été rejoint par l'officier que Napoléon lui avait expédié la veille à dix heures du soir, toute question eût disparu. Mais cet officier n'était point parvenu à sa destination, ainsi que le maréchal n'a cessé de l'affirmer toute sa vie, et il faut l'en croire, car autrement il n'aurait eu aucune raison pour hésiter. Cet officier avait-il été pris? avait-il passé à l'ennemi? C'est ce qu'on a toujours ignoré."—THIERS, *Histoire de l'Empire.* "Waterloo."

GOOD Father! . . . It was eve in middle June,
And war was waged anew
By great Napoleon, who for years had strewn
Men's bones all Europe through.

Three nights ere this, with columned corps he'd cross'd
The Sambre at Charleroi,
To move on Brussels, where the English host
Dallied in Parc and Bois.

The yestertide we'd heard the gloomy gun
Growl through the long-sunned day
From Quatre-Bras and Ligny; till the dun
Twilight suppressed the fray;

Albeit therein—as lated tongues bespoke—
Brunswick's high heart was drained,
And Prussia's Line and Landwehr, though unbroke,
Stood cornered and constrained.

And at next noon-time Grouchy slowly passed
With thirty thousand men:
We hoped thenceforth no army, small or vast,
Would trouble us again.

My hut lay deeply in a vale recessed,
And never a soul seemed nigh
When, reassured at length, we went to rest—
My children, wife, and I.

But what was this that broke our humble ease?
What noise, above the rain,
Above the dripping of the poplar trees
That smote along the pane?

—A call of mastery, bidding me arise,
Compelled me to the door,
At which a horseman stood in martial guise—
Splashed—sweating from every pore.

Had I seen Grouchy! Yes? What track took he?
Could I lead thither on?—
Fulfilment would ensure much gold for me,
Perhaps more gifts anon.

"I bear the Emperor's mandate," then he said,
"Charging the Marshal straight
To strike between the double host ahead
Ere they co-operate,

"Engaging Blücher till the Emperor put
Lord Wellington to flight,
*And next the Prussians. This to set afoot
Is my emprise to-night."*

I joined him in the mist; but, pausing, sought
To estimate his say.
Grouchy had made for Wavre; and yet, on thought,
I did not lead that way.

I mused: "If Grouchy thus and thus be told,
The clash comes sheer hereon;
My farm is stript. While, as for gifts of gold,
Money the French have none.

"Grouchy unwarned, moreo'er, the English win,
And mine is left to me—
They buy, not borrow."—Hence did I begin
To lead him treacherously.

And as we edged Joidoigne with cautious view
Dawn pierced the humid air;
And still I easted with him, though I knew
Never marched Grouchy there.

Near Ottignies we passed, across the Dyle
(Lim'lette left far aside),
And thence direct toward Pervez and Noville
Through green grain, till he cried:

"I doubt thy conduct, man! no track is here—
I doubt thy gagèd word!"
Thereat he scowled on me, and prancing near,
He pricked me with his sword.

"Nay, Captain, hold! We skirt, not trace the course
Of Grouchy," said I then:
"As we go, yonder went he, with his force
Of thirty thousand men."

—At length noon nighed; when west, from Saint-John's-Mound,
A hoarse artillery boomed,
And from Saint-Lambert's upland, chapel-crowned,
The Prussian squadrons loomed.

Then leaping to the wet wild path we had kept,
"My mission fails!" he cried;
"Too late for Grouchy now to intercept,
For, peasant, you have lied!"

He turned to pistol me. I sprang, and drew
The sabre from his flank,
And 'twixt his nape and shoulder, ere he knew,
I struck, and dead he sank.

I hid him deep in nodding rye and oat—
His shroud green stalks and loam;
His requiem the corn-blade's husky note—
And then I hastened home. . . .

—Two armies writhe in coils of red and blue,
And brass and iron clang
From Goumont, past the front of Waterloo,
To Pap'lotte and Smohain.

The Guard Imperial wavered on the height;
The Emperor's face grew glum;
"I sent," he said, "to Grouchy yesternight,
And yet he does not come!"

'Twas then, Good Father, that the French espied,
Streaking the summer land,
The men of Blucher. But the Emperor cried,
"Grouchy is now at hand!"

And meanwhile Vand'leur, Vivian, Maitland, Kempt,
Met d'Erlon, Friant, Ney;
But Grouchy—mis-sent, blamed, yet blame-exempt—
Grouchy was far away.

By even, slain or struck, Michel the strong,
Bold Travers, Dnop, Delord,
Smart Guyot, Reil-le, l'Heriter, Friant,
Scattered that champaign o'er.

Fallen likewise wronged Duhesme, and skilled Lobau
Did that red sunset see;
Colbert, Legros, Blancard! . . . And of the foe
Picton and Ponsonby;

With Gordon, Canning, Blackman, Ompteda,
L'Estrange, Delancey, Packe,
Grose, D'Oyly, Stables, Morice, Howard, Hay,
Von Schwerin, Watzdorf, Boek,

Smith, Phelips, Fuller, Lind, and Battersby,
And hosts of ranksmen round. . . .
Memorials linger yet to speak to thee
Of those that bit the ground!

The Guards' last column yielded; dykes of dead
Lay between vale and ridge,
As, thinned yet closing, faint yet fierce, they sped
In packs to Genappe Bridge.

Safe was my stock; my capple cow unslain;
Intact each cock and hen;
But Grouchy far at Wavre all day had lain,
And thirty thousand men.

O Saints, had I but lost my earing corn
And saved the cause once prized!
O Saints, why such false witness had I borne
When late I'd sympathized! . . .

So now, being old, my children eye askance
My slowly dwindling store,
And crave my mite; till, worn with tarriance,
I care for life no more.

To Almighty God henceforth I stand confessed,
And Virgin-Saint Marie;
O Michael, John, and Holy Ones in rest,
Entreat the Lord for me!

THE ALARM

(TRADITIONAL)

IN MEMORY OF ONE OF THE WRITER'S FAMILY WHO WAS A VOLUNTEER DURING THE WAR WITH NAPOLEON

IN a ferny byway
Near the great South-Wessex Highway,
A homestead raised its breakfast-smoke aloft;
The dew-damps still lay steamless, for the sun had made no skyway,
And twilight cloaked the croft.

It was almost past conceiving
Here, where woodbines hung inweaving,
That quite closely hostile armaments might steer,
Save from seeing in the porchway a fair woman mutely grieving,
And a harnessed Volunteer.

In haste he'd flown there
To his comely wife alone there,
While marching south hard by, to still her fears,
For she soon would be a mother, and few messengers were known there
In these campaigning years.

'Twas time to be Good-bying,
Since the assembly-hour was nighing
In royal George's town at six that morn;
And betwixt its wharves and this retreat were ten good miles of hieing
Ere ring of bugle-horn.

"I've laid in food, Dear,
And broached the spiced and brewed, Dear;
And if our July hope should antedate,
Let the char-wench mount and gallop by the halterpath and wood, Dear,
And fetch assistance straight.

"As for Buonaparte, forget him;
He's not like to land! But let him,
Those strike with aim who strike for wives and sons!
And the war-boats built to float him; 'twere but wanted to upset him
A slat from Nelson's guns!

"But, to assure thee,
And of creeping fears to cure thee,
If he *should* be rumoured anchoring in the Road,
Drive with the nurse to Kingsbere; and let nothing thence allure thee
Till we have him safe-bestowed.

"Now, to turn to marching matters:—
I've my knapsack, firelock, spatters,

Crossbelts, priming-horn, stock, bay'net, blackball, clay,
Pouch, magazine, and flint-box that at every quick-step clatters;—
My heart, Dear; that must stay!"

—With breathings broken
Farewell was kissed unspoken,
And they parted there as morning stroked the panes;
And the Volunteer went on, and turned, and twirled his glove for token,
And took the coastward lanes.

When above He'th Hills he found him,
He saw, on gazing round him,
The Barrow-Beacon burning—burning low,
As if, perhaps, enkindled ever since he'd homeward bound him;
And it meant: Expect the Foe!

Leaving the byway,
He entered on the highway,
Where were cars and chariots, faring fast inland;
"He's anchored, Soldier!" shouted some: "God save thee, marching thy way,
Th'lt front him on the strand!"

He slowed; he stopped; he paltered
Awhile with self, and faltered,
"Why courting misadventure shoreward roam?
To Molly, surely! Seek the woods with her till times have altered;
Charity favours home.

"Else, my denying
He'd come, she'll read as lying—
Think the Barrow-Beacon must have met my eyes—
That my words were not unwareness, but deceit of her, while vying
In deeds that jeopardize.

"At home is stocked provision,
And to-night, without suspicion,
We might bear it with us to a covert near;
Such sin, to save a childing wife, would earn it Christ's remission,
Though none forgive it here!"

While he stood thinking,
A little bird, perched drinking
Among the crowfoot tufts the river bore,
Was tangled in their stringy arms and fluttered, almost sinking
Near him, upon the moor.

He stepped in, reached, and seized it,
And, preening, had released it
But that a thought of Holy Writ occurred,
And Signs Divine ere battle, till it seemed him Heaven had pleased it
As guide to send the bird.

"O Lord, direct me! . . .
Doth Duty now expect me
To march a-coast, or guard my weak ones near?
Give this bird a flight according, that I thence learn to elect me
The southward or the rear."

He loosed his clasp; when, rising,
The bird—as if surmising—
Bore due to southward, crossing by the Froom,
And Durnover Great Field and Fort, the soldier clear advising—
Prompted he deemed by Whom.

Then on he panted
By grim Mai-Don, and slanted
Up the steep Ridge-way, hearkening between whiles;
Till nearing coast and harbour he beheld the shore-line planted
With Foot and Horse for miles.

Mistrusting not the omen,
He gained the beach, where Yeomen
Militia, Fencibles and Pikemen bold,
With Regulars in thousands, were enmassed to meet the Foemen,
Whose fleet had not yet shoaled.

Captain and Colonel,
Sere Generals, Ensigns vernal,
Were there; of neighbour-natives, Michel, Smith,
Meggs, Bingham, Gambier, Cunningham, to face the said nocturnal
Swoop on their land and kith.

But Buonaparte still tarried:
His project had miscarried;
At the last hour, equipped for victory,
The fleet had paused; his subtle combinations had been parried
By British strategy.

Homeward returning
Anon, no beacons burning,
No alarms, the Volunteer, in modest bliss,
Te Deum sang with wife and friends: "We praise Thee, Lord, discerning
That Thou hast helped in this!"

HER DEATH AND AFTER

THE summons was urgent: and forth I went—
By the way of the Western Wall, so drear
On that winter night, and sought a gate,
Where one, by Fate,
Lay dying that I held dear.

And there, as I paused by her tenement,
And the trees shed on me their rime and hoar,
I thought of the man who had left her lone—
Him who made her his own
When I loved her, long before.

The rooms within had the piteous shine
That home-things wear when there's aught amiss;
From the stairway floated the rise and fall
Of an infant's call,
Whose birth had brought her to this.

Her life was the price she would pay for that whine—
For a child by the man she did not love.
"But let that rest for ever," I said,
And bent my tread
To the bedchamber above.

She took my hand in her thin white own,
And smiled her thanks—though nigh too weak—
And made them a sign to leave us there,
Then faltered, ere
She could bring herself to speak.

"Just to see you—before I go—he'll condone
Such a natural thing now my time's not much—
When Death is so near it hustles hence
All passioned sense
Between woman and man as such!

"My husband is absent. As heretofore
The City detains him. But, in truth,
He has not been kind. . . . I will speak no blame,
But—the child is lame;
O, I pray she may reach his ruth!

"Forgive past days—I can say no more—
Maybe had we wed you would now repine! . . .
But I treated you ill. I was punished. Farewell!
—Truth shall I tell?
Would the child were yours and mine!

"As a wife I was true. But, such my unease
That, could I insert a deed back in Time,
I'd make her yours, to secure your care;
And the scandal bear,
And the penalty for the crime!"

—When I had left, and the swinging trees
Rang above me, as lauding her candid say,
Another was I. Her words were enough:
Came smooth, came rough,
I felt I could live my day.

Next night she died; and her obsequies
In the Field of Tombs where the earthworks frowned
Had her husband's heed. His tendance spent,
I often went
And pondered by her mound.

All that year and the next year whiled,
And I still went thitherward in the gloam;
But the Town forgot her and her nook,
And her husband took
Another Love to his home.

And the rumour flew that the lame lone child
Whom she wished for its safety child of mine,
Was treated ill when offspring came
Of the new-made dame,
And marked a more vigorous line.

A smarter grief within me wrought
Than even at loss of her so dear
That the being whose soul my soul suffused
Had a child ill-used,
While I dared not interfere!

One eve as I stood at my spot of thought
In the white-stoned Garth, brooding thus her wrong,
Her husband neared; and to shun his view
By her hallowed mew
I went from the tombs among

To the Cirque of the Gladiators which faced—
That haggard mark of Imperial Rome,
Whose Pagan echoes mock the chime
Of our Christian time—
And I drew to its bank, and clomb.

The sun's gold touch was scarce displaced
From the vast Arena where men once bled,
When her husband followed; bowed; half-passed
With lip upcast;
Then halting sullenly said:

'It is noised that you visit my first wife's tomb.
Now, I gave her an honoured name to bear
While living, when dead. So I've claim to ask
By what right you task
My patience by vigiling there?

"There's decency even in death, I assume;
Preserve it, sir, and keep away;
For the mother of my first-born you
Show mind undue!
—Sir, I've nothing more to say."

A desperate stroke discerned I then—
God pardon—or pardon not—the lie;
She had sighed that she wished (lest the child should pine
Of slights) 'twere mine,
So I said: "But the father I.

"That you thought it yours is the way of men;
But I won her troth long ere your day:
You learnt how, in dying, she summoned me?
'Twas in fealty.
—Sir, I've nothing more to say,

"Save that, if you'll hand me my little maid,
I'll take her, and rear her, and spare you toil.
Think it more than a friendly act none can;
I'm a lonely man,
While you've a large pot to boil.

"If not, and you'll put it to ball or blade—
To-night, to-morrow night, anywhere—
I'll meet you here. . . . But think of it,
And in season fit
Let me hear from you again."

—Well, I went away, hoping; but nought I heard
Of my stroke for the child, till there greeted me
A little voice that one day came
To my window-frame
And babbled innocently:

"My father who's not my own, sends word
I'm to stay here, sir, where I belong!"
Next a writing came: "Since the child was the fruit
Of your lawless suit,
Pray take her, to right a wrong."

And I did. And I gave the child my love,
And the child loved me, and estranged us none.
But compunctions loomed; for I'd harmed the dead
By what I said
For the good of the living one.

—Yet though, God wot, I am sinner enough,
And unworthy the woman who drew me so,
Perhaps this wrong for her darling's good
She forgives, or would,
If only she could know!

THE DANCE AT THE PHŒNIX

To Jenny came a gentle youth
From inland leazes lone,
His love was fresh as apple-blooth
By Parrett, Yeo, or Tone.
And duly he entreated her
To be his tender minister,
And take him for her own.

Now Jenny's life had hardly been
A life of modesty;
And few in Casterbridge had seen
More loves of sorts than she
From scarcely sixteen years above;
Among them sundry troopers of
The King's-Own Cavalry.

But each with charger, sword, and gun,
Had bluffed the Biscay wave;
And Jenny prized her rural one
For all the love he gave.
She vowed to be, if they were wed,
His honest wife in heart and head
From bride-ale hour to grave.

Wedded they were. Her husband's trust
In Jenny knew no bound,
And Jenny kept her pure and just,
Till even malice found
No sin or sign of ill to be
In one who walked so decently
The duteous helpmate's round.

Two sons were born, and bloomed to men,
And roamed, and were as not:
Alone was Jenny left again
As ere her mind had sought
A solace in domestic joys,
And ere the vanished pair of boys
Were sent to sun her cot.

She numbered near on sixty years,
And passed as elderly,
When, on a day, with flushing fears,
She learnt from shouts of glee,
And shine of swords, and thump of drum,
Her early loves from war had come,
The King's-Own Cavalry.

She turned aside, and bowed her head
Anigh Saint Peter's door;
"Alas for chastened thoughts!" she said;
"I'm faded now, and hoar,
And yet those notes—they thrill me through,
And those gay forms move me anew
As they moved me of yore!" . . .

'Twas Christmas, and the Phœnix Inn
Was lit with tapers tall,
For thirty of the trooper men
Had vowed to give a ball
As "Theirs" had done ('twas handed down)
When lying in the selfsame town
Ere Buonaparté's fall.

That night the throbbing "Soldier's Joy,"
The measured tread and sway
"Of "Fancy-Lad" and "Maiden Coy,"
Reached Jenny as she lay
Beside her spouse; till springtide blood
Seemed scouring through her like a flood
That whisked the years away.

She rose, arrayed, and decked her head
Where the bleached hairs grew thin;
Upon her cap two bows of red
She fixed with hasty pin;

Unheard descending to the street
She trod the flags with tune-led feet,
And stood before the Inn.

Save for the dancers', not a sound
Disturbed the icy air;
No watchman on his midnight round
Or traveller was there;
But over All-Saints', high and bright,
Pulsed to the music Sirius white,
The Wain by Bullstake Square.

She knocked, but found her further stride
Checked by a sergeant tall:
"Gay Granny, whence come you?" he cried;
"This is a private ball."
—"No one has more right here than me!
Ere you were born, man," answered she,
"I knew the regiment all!"

"Take not the lady's visit ill!"
The steward said; "for see,
We lack sufficient partners still,
So, prithee, let her be!"
They seized and whirled her mid the maze,
And Jenny felt as in the days
Of her immodesty.

Hour chased each hour, and night advanced;
She sped as shod with wings;
Each time and every time she danced—
Reels, jigs, poussettes, and flings:
They cheered her as she soared and swooped,
(She had learnt ere art in dancing drooped
From hops to slothful swings).

The favourite Quick-step "Speed the Plough"—
(Cross hands, cast off, and wheel)—
"The Triumph," "Sylph," "The Row-dow-dow,"
Famed "Major Malley's Reel,"
"The Duke of York's," "The Fairy Dance,"
"The Bridge of Lodi" (brought from France),
She beat out, toe and heel.

The "Fall of Paris" clanged its close,
And Peter's chime went four,
When Jenny, bosom-beating, rose
To seek her silent door.
They tiptoed in escorting her,
Lest stroke of heel or clink of spur
Should break her goodman's snore.

The fire that lately burnt fell slack
When lone at last was she;
Her nine-and-fifty years came back;
She sank upon her knee
Beside the durn, and like a dart
A something arrowed through her heart
In shoots of agony.

Their footsteps died as she leant there,
Lit by the morning star
Hanging above the moorland, where
The aged elm-rows are;
As overnight, from Pummery Ridge
To Maembury Ring and Standfast Bridge
No life stirred, near or far.

Though inner mischief worked amain,
She reached her husband's side;
Where, toil-weary, as he had lain
Beneath the patchwork pied
When forthward yestereve she crept,
And as unwitting, still he slept
Who did in her confide.

A tear sprang as she turned and viewed
His features free from guile;
She kissed him long, as when, just wooed,
She chose his domicile.
She felt she would give more than life
To be the single-hearted wife.
That she had been erstwhile. . . .

Time wore to six. Her husband rose
And struck the steel and stone;
He glanced at Jenny, whose repose
Seemed deeper than his own.

With dumb dismay, on closer sight,
He gathered sense that in the night,
Or morn, her soul had flown.

When told that some too mighty strain
For one so many-yeared
Had burst her bosom's master-vein,
His doubts remained unstirred.
His Jenny had not left his side
Betwixt the eve and morning-tide:
—The King's said not a word.

Well! times are not as times were then,
Nor fair ones half so free;
And truly they were martial men,
The King's-Own Cavalry.
And when they went from Casterbridge
And vanished over Mellstock Ridge,
'Twas saddest morn to see.

THE CASTERBRIDGE CAPTAINS

(KHYBER PASS, 1842)

A TRADITION OF J. B. L——, T. G. B——, AND J. L.

THREE captains went to Indian wars,
And only one returned:
Their mate of yore, he singly wore
The laurels all had earned.

At home he sought the ancient aisle
Wherein, untrumped of fame,
The three had sat in pupilage,
And each had carved his name.

The names, rough-hewn, of equal size,
Stood on the panel still;
Unequal since.—"'Twas theirs to aim,
Mine was it to fulfil!"

—"Who saves his life shall lose it, friends!"
Outspake the preacher then,
Unweeting he his listener, who
Looked at the names again.

That he had come and they had been stayed
Was but the chance of war:
Another chance, and they had been here,
And he had lain afar.

Yet saw he something in the lives
Of those who had ceased to live
That sphered them with a majesty
Which living failed to give.

Transcendent triumph in return
No longer lit his brain;
Transcendence rayed the distant urn
Where slept the fallen twain.

A SIGN-SEEKER

I MARK the months in liveries dank and dry,
The noontides many-shaped and hued;
I see the nightfall shades subtrude,
And hear the monotonous hours clang negligently by.

I view the evening bonfires of the sun
On hills where morning rains have hissed;
The eyeless countenance of the mist
Pallidly rising when the summer droughts are done.

I have seen the lightning-blade, the leaping star,
The cauldrons of the sea in storm,
Have felt the earthquake's lifting arm,
And trodden where abysmal fires and snow-cones are.

I learn to prophesy the hid eclipse,
The coming of eccentric orbs;
To mete the dust the sky absorbs,
To weigh the sun, and fix the hour each planet dips.

I witness fellow earth-men surge and strive;
   Assemblies meet, and throb, and part;
   Death's sudden finger, sorrow's smart;
—All the vast various moils that mean a world alive.

But that I fain would wot of shuns my sense—
   Those sights of which old prophets tell,
   Those signs the general word so well
As vouchsafed their unheed, denied my long suspense.

In graveyard green, where his pale dust lies pent
   To glimpse a phantom parent, friend,
   Wearing his smile, and "Not the end!"
Outbreathing softly: that were blest enlightenment;

Or, if a dead Love's lips, whom dreams reveal
   When midnight imps of King Decay
   Delve sly to solve me back to clay,
Should leave some print to prove her spirit-kisses real;

Or, when Earth's Frail lie bleeding of her Strong,
   If some Recorder, as in Writ,
   Near to the weary scene should flit
And drop one plume as pledge that Heaven inscrolls the wrong.

—There are who, rapt to heights of trancelike trust,
   These tokens claim to feel and see,
   Read radiant hints of times to be—
Of heart to heart returning after dust to dust.

Such scope is granted not to lives like mine . . .
   I have lain in dead men's beds, have walked
   The tombs of those with whom I had talked,
Called many a gone and goodly one to shape a sign,

And panted for response. But none replies;
   No warnings loom, nor whisperings
   To open out my limitings,
And Nescience mutely muses: When a man falls he lies.

MY CICELY

(17—).

"ALIVE?"—And I leapt in my wonder,
Was faint of my joyance,
And grasses and grove shone in garments
Of glory to me.

"She lives, in a plenteous well-being,
To-day as aforehand;
The dead bore the name—though a rare one—
The name that bore she."

She lived . . . I, afar in the city
Of frenzy-led factions,
Had squandered green years and maturer
In bowing the knee

To Baals illusive and specious,
Till chance had there voiced me
That one I loved vainly in nonage
Had ceased her to be.

The passion the planets had scowled on,
And change had let dwindle,
Her death-rumour smartly relifted
To full apogee.

I mounted a steed in the dawning
With acheful remembrance,
And made for the ancient West Highway
To far Exonb'ry.

Passing heaths, and the House of Long Sieging,
I neared the thin steeple
That tops the fair fane of Poore's olden
Episcopal see;

And, changing anew my blown bearer,
I traversed the downland
Whereon the bleak hill-graves of Chieftains
Bulge barren of tree;

And still sadly onward I followed
  That Highway the Icen,
Which trails its pale riband down Wessex
  By lynchet and lea.

Along through the Stour-bordered Forum,
  Where Legions had wayfared,
And where the slow river-face glasses
  Its green canopy,

And by Weatherbury Castle, and thencefrom
  Through Casterbridge held I
Still on, to entomb her my mindsight
  Saw stretched pallidly.

No highwayman's trot blew the night-wind
  To me so life-weary,
But only the creak of a gibbet
  Or waggoner's jee.

Triple-ramparted Maidon gloomed grayly
  Above me from southward,
And north the hill-fortress of Eggar,
  And square Pummerie.

The Nine-Pillared Cromlech, the Bride-streams,
  The Axe, and the Otter
I passed, to the gate of the city
  Where Exe scents the sea;

Till, spent, in the graveacre pausing,
  I learnt 'twas not *my* Love
To whom Mother Church had just murmured
  A last lullaby.

—"Then, where dwells the Canon's kinswoman,
  My friend of aforetime?"
I asked, to disguise my heart-heavings
  And new ecstasy.

"She wedded."—"Ah!"—"Wedded beneath her—
  She keeps the stage-hostel
Ten miles hence, beside the great Highway—
  The famed Lions-Three.

"Her spouse was her lackey—no option
'Twixt wedlock and worse things;
A lapse over-sad for a lady
Of her pedigree!"

I shuddered, said nothing, and wandered
To shades of green laurel:
More ghastly than death were these tidings
Of life's irony!

For, on my ride down I had halted
Awhile at the Lions,
And her—her whose name had once opened
My heart as a key—

I had looked on, unknowing, and witnessed
Her jests with the tapsters,
Her liquor-fired face, her thick accents
In naming her fee.

"O God, why this seeming derision!"
I cried in my anguish:
"O once Loved, O fair Unforgotten—
That Thing—meant it thee!

"Inurned and at peace, lost but sainted,
Were grief I could compass;
Depraved—'tis for Christ's poor dependent
A cruel decree!"

I backed on the Highway; but passed not
The hostel. Within there
Too mocking to Love's re-expression
Was Time's repartee!

Uptracking where Legions had wayfared
By cromlechs unstoried,
And lynchets, and sepultured Chieftains,
In self-colloquy,

A feeling stirred in me and strengthened
That *she* was not my Love,
But she of the garth, who lay rapt in
Her long reverie.

And thence till to-day I persuade me
  That this was the true one;
That Death stole intact her young dearness
  And innocency.

Frail-witted, illuded they call me;
  I may be. Far better
To dream than to own the debasement
  Of sweet Cicely.

Moreover I rate it unseemly
  To hold that kind Heaven
Could work such device—to her ruin
  And my misery.

So, lest I disturb my choice vision,
  I shun the West Highway,
Even now, when the knaps ring with rhythms
  From blackbird and bee;

And feel that with slumber half-conscious
  She rests in the church-hay,
Her spirit unsoiled as in youth-time
  When lovers were we.

HER IMMORTALITY

UPON a noon I pilgrimed through
    A pasture, mile by mile,
Unto the place where last I saw
    My dead Love's living smile.

And sorrowing I lay me down
    Upon the heated sod:
It seemed as if my body pressed
    The very ground she trod.

I lay, and thought; and in a trance
    She came and stood thereby—
The same, even to the marvellous ray
    That used to light her eye.

"You draw me, and I come to you,
My faithful one," she said,
In voice that had the moving tone
It bore ere breath had fled.

"Seven years have circled since I died:
Few now remember me;
My husband clasps another bride:
My children's love has she.

"My brethren, sisters, and my friends
Care not to meet my sprite:
Who prized me most I did not know
Till I passed down from sight."

I said: "My days are lonely here;
I need thy smile alway:
I'll use this night my ball or blade,
And join thee ere the day."

A tremor stirred her tender lips,
Which parted to dissuade:
"That cannot be, O friend," she cried;
"Think, I am but a Shade!

"A Shade but in its mindful ones
Has immortality;
By living, me you keep alive,
By dying you slay me.

"In you resides my single power
Of sweet continuance here;
On your fidelity I count
Through many a coming year.'

—I started through me at her plight,
So suddenly confessed:
Dismissing late distaste for life,
I craved its bleak unrest.

"I will not die, my One of all!—
To lengthen out thy days
I'll guard me from minutest harms
That may invest my ways!"

She smiled and went. Since then she comes
Oft when her birth-moon climbs,
Or at the seasons' ingresses,
Or anniversary times;

But grows my grief. When I surcease,
Through whom alone lives she,
Her spirit ends its living lease,
Never again to be!

THE IVY-WIFE

I LONGED to love a full-boughed beech
And be as high as he:
I stretched an arm within his reach,
And signalled unity.
But with his drip he forced a breach,
And tried to poison me.

I gave the grasp of partnership
To one of other race—
A plane: he barked him strip by strip
From upper bough to base;
And me therewith; for gone my grip,
My arms could not enlace.

In new affection next I strove
To coll an ash I saw,
And he in trust received my love;
Till with my soft green claw
I cramped and bound him as I wove . . .
Such was my love: ha-ha!

By this I gained his strength and height
Without his rivalry.
But in my triumph I lost sight
Of afterhaps. Soon he,
Being bark-bound, flagged, snapped, fell outright,
And in his fall felled me!

A MEETING WITH DESPAIR

As evening shaped I found me on a moor
Sight shunned to entertain:
The black lean land, of featureless contour,
Was like a tract in pain.

"This scene, like my own life," I said, "is one
Where many glooms abide;
Toned by its fortune to a deadly dun—
Lightless on every side."

I glanced aloft and halted, pleasure-caught
To see the contrast there:
The ray-lit clouds gleamed glory; and I thought,
"Ah—solace everywhere!"

Then bitter self-reproaches as I stood
I dealt me silently
As one perverse, misrepresenting Good
In graceless mutiny.

Against the horizon's dim-discernèd wheel
A form rose, strange of mould:
That he was hideous, hopeless, I could feel
Rather than could behold.

"'Tis a dead spot, where even the light lies spent
To darkness!" croaked the Thing.
"Not if you look aloft!" said I, intent
On my new reasoning.

"Yea—but await awhile!" he cried. "Ho-ho!—
Now look aloft and see!"
I looked. There, too, sat night: Heaven's radiant show
Had gone that heartened me.

UNKNOWING

When, soul in soul reflected,
We breathed an æthered air,
When we neglected
All things elsewhere,

And left the friendly friendless
To keep our love aglow,
　　We deemed it endless . . .
　　—We did not know!

When panting passion-goaded,
We planned to hie away,
　　But, unforeboded,
　　The livelong day
Wild storm so pierced and pattered
That none could up and go,
　　Our lives seemed shattered . . .
　　—We did not know!

When I found you helpless lying,
And you waived my long misprise,
　　And swore me, dying,
　　In phantom-guise
To wing to me when grieving,
And touch away my woe,
　　We kissed, believing . . .
　　—We did not know!

But though, your powers outreckoning,
You tarry dead and dumb,
　　Or scorn my beckoning,
　　And will not come:
And I say, "Why thus inanely
Brood on her memory so!"
　　I say it vainly—
　　I feel and know!

FRIENDS BEYOND

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
　　Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock churchyard now!

"Gone," I call them, gone for good, that group of local hearts and heads;
　　Yet at mothy curfew-tide,
And at midnight when the noon-heat breathes it back from walls and leads,

They've a way of whispering to me—fellow-wight who yet abide—
In the muted, measured note
Of a ripple under archways, or a lone cave's stillicide:

"We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to antidote,
Unsuccesses to success,
Many thought-worn eves and morrows to a morrow free of thought.

"No more need we corn and clothing, feel of old terrestial stress;
Chill detraction stirs no sigh;
Fear of death has even bygone us: death gave all that we possess."

W. D.—"Ye mid burn the old bass-viol that I set such value by."
Squire.—"You may hold the manse in fee,
You may wed my spouse, may let my children's memory of me die."

Lady S.—"You may have my rich brocades, my laces; take each household key;
Ransack coffer, desk, bureau;
Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept by me."

Far.—"Ye mid zell my favourite heifer, ye mid let the charlock grow,
Foul the grinterns, give up thrift."
Far. Wife.—"If ye break my best blue china, children, I shan't care or ho."

All.—"We've no wish to hear the tidings, how the people's fortunes shift;
What your daily doings are;
Who are wedded, born, divided; if your lives beat slow or swift.

"Curious not the least are we if our intents you make or mar,
If you quire to our old tune,
If the City stage still passes, if the weirs still roar afar."

—Thus, with very gods' composure, freed those crosses late and soon
Which, in life, the Trine allow
(Why, none witteth), and ignoring all that haps beneath the moon,

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, murmur mildly to me now.

TO OUTER NATURE

SHOW thee as I thought thee
When I early sought thee,
Omen-scouting,
All undoubting
Love alone had wrought thee—

Wrought thee for my pleasure,
Planned thee as a measure
For expounding
And resounding
Glad things that men treasure.

O for but a moment
Of that old endowment—
Light to gaily
See thy daily
Iris-hued embowment!

But such re-adorning
Time forbids with scorning—
Makes me see things
Cease to be things
They were in my morning.

Fadest thou, glow-forsaken,
Darkness-overtaken!
Thy first sweetness,
Radiance, meetness,
None shall re-awaken.

Why not sempiternal
Thou and I? Our vernal
Brightness keeping,
Time outleaping;
Passed the hodiernal!

THOUGHTS OF PHENA

AT NEWS OF HER DEATH

Not a line of her writing have I,
Not a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there;
And in vain do I urge my unsight
To conceive my lost prize
At her close, whom I knew when her dreams were upbrimming with light,
And with laughter her eyes.

What scenes spread around her last days,
Sad, shining, or dim?
Did her gifts and compassions enray and enarch her sweet ways
With an aureate nimb?
Or did life-light decline from her years,
And mischances control
Her full day-star; unease, or regret, or forebodings, or fears
Disennoble her soul?

Thus I do but the phantom retain
Of the maiden of yore
As my relic; yet haply the best of her—fined in my brain
It may be the more
That no line of her writing have I,
Nor a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there.

March 1890.

MIDDLE-AGE ENTHUSIASMS

TO M. H.

We passed where flag and flower
Signalled a jocund throng;
We said: "Go to, the hour
Is apt!"—and joined the song;
And, kindling, laughed at life and care,
Although we knew no laugh lay there.

We walked where shy birds stood
Watching us, wonder-dumb;
Their friendship met our mood;
We cried: "We'll often come:
We'll come morn, noon, eve, everywhen!"
—We doubted we should come again.

We joyed to see strange sheens
Leap from quaint leaves in shade;
A secret light of greens
They'd for their pleasure made.
We said: "We'll set such sorts as these!"
—We knew with night the wish would cease.

"So sweet the place," we said,
"Its tacit tales so dear,
Our thoughts, when breath has sped,
Will meet and mingle here!" . . .
"Words!" mused we. "Passed the mortal door,
Our thoughts will reach this nook no more."

IN A WOOD

From "The Woodlanders"

PALE beech and pine so blue,
Set in one clay,
Bough to bough cannot you
Live out your day?
When the rains skim and skip,
Why mar sweet comradeship,
Blighting with poison-drip
Neighbourly spray?

Heart-halt and spirit-lame,
City-opprest,
Unto this wood I came
As to a nest;
Dreaming that sylvan peace
Offered the harrowed ease—
Nature a soft release
From men's unrest.

But, having entered in,
Great growths and small
Show them to men akin—
Combatants all!
Sycamore shoulders oak,
Bines the slim sapling yoke,
Ivy-spun halters choke
Elms stout and tall.

Touches from ash, O wych,
Sting you like scorn!
You, too, brave hollies, twitch
Sidelong from thorn.
Even the rank poplars bear
Illy a rival's air,
Cankering in black despair
If overborne.

Since, then, no grace I find
Taught me of trees,
Turn I back to my kind,
Worthy as these.
There at least smiles abound,
There discourse trills around,
There, now and then, are found
Life-loyalties.

1887: 1896.

TO A LADY

OFFENDED BY A BOOK OF THE WRITER'S

Now that my page is exiled,—doomed, maybe,
Never to press thy cosy cushions more,
Or wake thy ready Yeas as heretofore,
Or stir thy gentle vows of faith in me:

Knowing thy natural receptivity,
I figure that, as flambeaux banish eve,
My sombre image, warped by insidious heave
Of those less forthright, must lose place in thee.

So be it. I have borne such. Let thy dreams
Of me and mine diminish day by day,
And yield their space to shine of smugger things;
Till I shape to thee but in fitful gleams,
And then in far and feeble visitings,
And then surcease. Truth will be truth alway.

TO A MOTHERLESS CHILD

AH, child, thou art but half thy darling mother's;
Hers couldst thou wholly be,
My light in thee would outglow all in others;
She would relive to me.
But niggard Nature's trick of birth
Bars, lest she overjoy,
Renewal of the loved on earth
Save with alloy.

The Dame has no regard, alas, my maiden,
For love and loss like mine—
No sympathy with mindsight memory-laden;
Only with fickle eyne.
To her mechanic artistry
My dreams are all unknown,
And why I wish that thou couldst be
But One's alone!

NATURE'S QUESTIONING

WHEN I look forth at dawning, pool,
Field, flock, and lonely tree,
All seem to gaze at me
Like chastened children sitting silent in a school;

Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn,
As though the master's ways
Through the long teaching days
Had cowed them till their early zest was overborne.

Upon them stirs in lippings mere
(As if once clear in call,
But now scarce breathed at all)—
"We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!

"Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

"Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains? . . .
Or are we live remains
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?

"Or is it that some high Plan betides,
As yet not understood,
Of Evil stormed by Good,
We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?"

Thus things around. No answerer I. . .
Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
And Earth's old glooms and pains
Are still the same, and Death and glad Life neighbour nigh.

THE IMPERCIPIENT

(AT A CATHEDRAL SERVICE)

THAT with this bright believing band
I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a strange destiny.

Why thus my soul should be consigned
To infelicity,
Why always I must feel as blind
To sights my brethren see,
Why joys they've found I cannot find,
Abides a mystery.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's-Well to me,
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!

I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing upfingered, with, "Hark! hark!
The glorious distant sea!"
And feel, "Alas, 'tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me!"

Yet I would bear my shortcomings
With meet tranquillity,
But for the charge that blessed things
I'd liefer not have be.
O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully!

. . . . .

Enough. As yet disquiet clings
About us. Rest shall we.

AT AN INN

WHEN we as strangers sought
Their catering care,
Veiled smiles bespoke their thought
Of what we were.
They warmed as they opined
Us more than friends—
That we had all resigned
For love's dear ends.

And that swift sympathy
With living love
Which quicks the world—maybe
The spheres above,
Made them our ministers,
Moved them to say,
"Ah, God, that bliss like theirs
Would flush our day!"

And we were left alone
As Love's own pair;
Yet never the love-light shone
Between us there!
But that which chilled the breath
Of afternoon,
And palsied unto death
The pane-fly's tune.

The kiss their zeal foretold,
And now deemed come,
Came not: within his hold
Love lingered numb.
Why cast he on our port
A bloom not ours?
Why shaped us for his sport
In after-hours?

As we seemed we were not
That day afar,
And now we seem not what
We aching are.
O severing sea and land,
O laws of men,
Ere death, once let us stand
As we stood then!

THE SLOW NATURE

(AN INCIDENT OF FROOM VALLEY)

"THY husband—poor, poor Heart!—is dead—
Dead, out by Moreford Rise;
A bull escaped the barton-shed,
Gored him, and there he lies!"

—"Ha, ha—go away! 'Tis a tale, methink,
Thou joker Kit!" laughed she.
"I've known thee many a year, Kit Twink,
And ever hast thou fooled me!'

—"But, Mistress Damon—I can swear
Thy goodman John is dead!
And soon th'lt hear their feet who bear
His body to his bed."

So unwontedly sad was the merry man's face—
That face which had long deceived—
That she gazed and gazed; and then could trace
The truth there; and she believed.

She laid a hand on the dresser-ledge,
And scanned far Egdon-side;
And stood; and you heard the wind-swept sedge
And the rippling Froom; till she cried:

"O my chamber's untidied, unmade my bed,
Though the day has begun to wear!
'What a slovenly hussif!' it will be said,
When they all go up my stair!"

She disappeared; and the joker stood
Depressed by his neighbour's doom,
And amazed that a wife struck to widowhood
Thought first of her unkempt room.

But a fortnight thence she could take no food,
And she pined in a slow decay;
While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
And laughed in his ancient way.

1894.

IN A EWELEAZE NEAR WEATHERBURY

THE years have gathered grayly
Since I danced upon this leaze
With one who kindled gaily
Love's fitful ecstasies!
But despite the term as teacher,
I remain what I was then
In each essential feature
Of the fantasies of men.

Yet I note the little chisel
Of never-napping Time
Defacing wan and grizzel
The blazon of my prime.
When at night he thinks me sleeping
I feel him boring sly
Within my bones, and heaping
Quaintest pains for by-and-by.

Still, I'd go the world with Beauty,
I would laugh with her and sing,
I would shun divinest duty
To resume her worshipping.
But she'd scorn my brave endeavour,
She would not balm the breeze
By murmuring "Thine for ever!"
As she did upon this leaze.

1890.

THE BRIDE-NIGHT FIRE

(A WESSEX TRADITION)

THEY had long met o' Zundays—her true love and she—
And at junketings, maypoles, and flings;
But she bode wi' a thirtover[1] uncle, and he
Swore by noon and by night that her goodman should be
Naibour Sweatley—a wight often weak at the knee
From taking o' sommat more cheerful than tea—
Who tranted,[2] and moved people's things.

She cried, "O pray pity me!" Nought would he hear;
Then with wild rainy eyes she obeyed.
She chid when her Love was for clinking off wi' her:
The pa'son was told, as the season drew near,
To throw over pu'pit the names of the pair
As fitting one flesh to be made.

The wedding-day dawned and the morning drew on;
The couple stood bridegroom and bride;
The evening was passed, and when midnight had gone
The feasters horned,[3] "God save the King," and anon
The pair took their homealong[4] ride.

[1] *thirtover*, cross. [2] *tranted*, traded as carrier.
[3] *horned*, sang loudly. [4] *homealong*, homeward.

The lover Tim Tankens mourned heart-sick and leer [1]
To be thus of his darling deprived:
He roamed in the dark ath'art field, mound, and mere,
And, a'most without knowing it, found himself near
The house of the tranter, and now of his Dear,
Where the lantern-light showed 'em arrived.

The bride sought her chamber so calm and so pale
That a Northern had thought her resigned;
But to eyes that had seen her in tidetimes [2] of weal,
Like the white cloud o' smoke, the red battlefield's vail,
That look spak' of havoc behind.

The bridegroom yet laitered a beaker to drain,
Then reeled to the linhay [3] for more,
When the candle-snoff kindled some chaff from his grain—
Flames spread, and red vlankers [4] wi' might and wi' main
Around beams, thatch, and chimley-tun [5] roar.

Young Tim away yond, rafted [6] up by the light,
Through brimbles and underwood tears,
Till he comes to the orchet, when crooping [7] from sight
In the lewth [8] of a codlin-tree, bivering [9] wi' fright,
Wi' on'y her night-rail to cover her plight,
His lonesome young Barbree appears.

Her cwold little figure half-naked he views
Played about by the frolicsome breeze,
Her light-tripping totties,[10] her ten little tooes,
All bare and besprinkled wi' Fall's [11] chilly dews,
While her great gallied [12] eyes through her hair hanging loose
Shone as stars through a tardle [13] o' trees.

She eyed him; and, as when a weir-hatch is drawn,
Her tears, penned by terror afore,
With a rushing of sobs in a shower were strawn,
Till her power to pour 'em seemed wasted and gone
From the heft [14] o' misfortune she bore.

1 *leer*, empty-stomached.
2 *tidetimes*, holidays.
3 *linhay*, lean-to building.
4 *vlankers*, fire-flakes.
5 *chimley-tun*, chimney-stack.
6 *rafted*, roused.
7 *crooping*, squatting down.
8 *lewth*, shelter.
9 *bivering*, with chattering teeth.
10 *totties*, feet.
11 *Fall*, autumn.
12 *gallied*, frightened.
13 *tardle*, entanglement.
14 *heft*, weight.

"O Tim, my *own* Tim I must call 'ee—I will!
All the world has turned round on me so!
Can you help her who loved 'ee, though acting so ill?
Can you pity her misery—feel for her still?
When worse than her body so quivering and chill
Is her heart in its winter o' woe!

"I think I mid[1] almost ha' borne it," she said,
"Had my griefs one by one come to hand;
But O, to be slave to thik husbird,[2] for bread,
And then, upon top o' that, driven to wed,
And then, upon top o' that, burnt out o' bed,
Is more than my nater can stand!"

Like a lion 'ithin en Tim's spirit outsprung—
(Tim had a great soul when his feelings were wrung)—
"Feel for 'ee, dear Barbree?" he cried;
And his warm working-jacket then straightway he flung
Round about her, and horsed her by jerks, till she clung
Like a chiel on a gipsy, her figure uphung
By the sleeves that he tightly had tied.

Over piggeries, and mixens,[3] and apples, and hay,
They lumpered[4] straight into the night;
And finding ere long where a halter-path[5] lay,
Sighted Tim's house by dawn, on'y seen on their way
By a naibour or two who were up wi' the day,
But who gathered no clue to the sight.

Then tender Tim Tankens he searched here and there
For some garment to clothe her fair skin;
But though he had breeches and waistcoats to spare,
He had nothing quite seemly for Barbree to wear,
Who, half shrammed[6] to death, stood and cried on a chair
At the caddle[7] she found herself in.

There was one thing to do, and that one thing he did,
He lent her some clothes of his own,

[1] *mid*, might.
[2] *thik husbird*, that rascal.
[3] *mixens*, manure-heaps.
[4] *lumpered*, stumbled.
[5] *halter-path*, bridle-path.
[6] *shrammed*, numbed.
[7] *caddle*, quandary.

And she took 'em perforce; and while swiftly she slid
Them upon her Tim turned to the winder, as bid,
Thinking, "O that the picter my duty keeps hid
To the sight o' my eyes mid[1] be shown!"

In the tallet[2] he stowed her; there huddied[3] she lay,
Shortening sleeves, legs, and tails to her limbs;
But most o' the time in a mortal bad way,
Well knowing that there'd be the divel to pay
If 'twere found that, instead o' the element's prey,
She was living in lodgings at Tim's.

"Where's the tranter?" said men and boys; "where can he be?"
"Where's the tranter?" said Barbree alone.
"Where on e'th is the tranter?" said everybod-y:
They sifted the dust of his perished roof-tree,
And all they could find was a bone.

Then the uncle cried, "Lord, pray have mercy on me!"
And in terror began to repent.
But before 'twas complete, and till sure she was free,
Barbree drew up her loft-ladder, tight turned her key—
Tim bringing up breakfast and dinner and tea—
Till the news of her hiding got vent.

Then followed the custom-kept rout, shout, and flare
Of a skimmity-ride[4] through the naibourhood, ere
Folk had proof o' wold[5] Sweatley's decay.
Whereupon decent people all stood in a stare,
Saying Tim and his lodger should risk it, and pair:
So he took her to church. An' some laughing lads there
Cried to Tim, "After Sweatley!" She said, "I declare
I stand as a maiden to-day!"

Written 1866; printed 1875.

[1] *mid*, might.
[2] *tallet*, loft.
[3] *huddied*, hidden.
[4] *skimmity-ride*, satirical procession with effigies.
[5] *wold*, old.

HEIRESS AND ARCHITECT

FOR A. W. B.

SHE sought the Studios, beckoning to her side
An arch-designer, for she planned to build.
He was of wise contrivance, deeply skilled
In every intervolve of high and wide—
Well fit to be her guide.

"Whatever it be,"
Responded he,
With cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view,
"In true accord with prudent fashionings
For such vicissitudes as living brings,
And thwarting not the law of stable things,
That will I do."

"Shape me," she said, "high halls with tracery
And open ogive-work, that scent and hue
Of buds, and travelling bees, may come in through,
The note of birds, and singings of the sea,
For these are much to me."

"An idle whim!"
Broke forth from him
Whom nought could warm to gallantries:
"Cede all these buds and birds, the zephyr's call,
And scents, and hues, and things that falter all,
And choose as best the close and surly wall,
For winters freeze."

"Then frame," she cried, "wide fronts of crystal glass,
That I may show my laughter and my light—
Light like the sun's by day, the stars' by night—
Till rival heart-queens, envying, wail, 'Alas,
Her glory!' as they pass."

"O maid misled!"
He sternly said
Whose facile foresight pierced her dire;
"Where shall abide the soul when, sick of glee,
It shrinks, and hides, and prays no eye may see?
Those house them best who house for secrecy,
For you will tire."

"A little chamber, then, with swan and dove
Ranged thickly, and engrailed with rare device
Of reds and purples, for a Paradise
Wherein my Love may greet me, I my Love,
When he shall know thereof?"

"This, too, is ill,"
He answered still,
The man who swayed her like a shade.
"An hour will come when sight of such sweet nook
Would bring a bitterness too sharp to brook,
When brighter eyes have won away his look;
For you will fade."

Then said she faintly: "O, contrive some way—
Some narrow winding turret, quite mine own,
To reach a loft where I may grieve alone!
It is a slight thing; hence do not, I pray,
This last dear fancy slay!"

"Such winding ways
Fit not your days,"
Said he, the man of measuring eye;
"I must even fashion as the rule declares,
To wit: Give space (since life ends unawares)
To hale a coffined corpse adown the stairs;
For you will die."

1867.

THE TWO MEN

THERE were two youths of equal age,
Wit, station, strength, and parentage;
They studied at the selfsame schools,
And shaped their thoughts by common rules.

One pondered on the life of man,
His hopes, his ending, and began
To rate the Market's sordid war
As something scarce worth living for

"I'll brace to higher aims," said he,
"I'll further Truth and Purity;
Thereby to mend the mortal lot
And sweeten sorrow. Thrive I not,

"Winning their hearts, my kind will give
Enough that I may lowly live,
And house my Love in some dim dell,
For pleasing them and theirs so well."

Idly attired, with features wan,
In secret swift he laboured on:
Such press of power had brought much gold
Applied to things of meaner mould.

Sometimes he wished his aims had been
To gather gains like other men;
Then thanked his God he'd traced his track
Too far for wish to drag him back.

He looked down from his loft one day
To where his slighted garden lay;
Nettles and hemlock hid each lawn,
And every flower was starved and gone.

He fainted in his heart, whereon
He rose, and sought his plighted one,
Resolved to loose her bond withal,
Lest she should perish in his fall.

He met her with a careless air,
As though he'd ceased to find her fair,
And said: "True love is dust to me;
I cannot kiss: I tire of thee!"

(That she might scorn him was he fain,
To put her sooner out of pain;
For angered love breathes quick and dies,
When famished love long-lingering lies.)

Once done, his soul was so betossed,
It found no more the force it lost:
Hope was his only drink and food,
And hope extinct, decay ensued.

And, living long so closely penned,
He had not kept a single friend;
He dwindled thin as phantoms be,
And drooped to death in poverty. . . .

Meantime his schoolmate had gone out
To join the fortune-finding rout;
He liked the winnings of the mart,
But wearied of the working part.

He turned to seek a privy lair,
Neglecting note of garb and hair,
And day by day reclined and thought
How he might live by doing nought.

"I plan a valued scheme" he said
To some. "But lend me of your bread,
And when the vast result looms nigh,
In profit you shall stand as I."

Yet they took counsel to restrain
Their kindness till they saw the gain;
And, since his substance now had run,
He rose to do what might be done.

He went unto his Love by night,
And said: "My Love, I faint in fight:
Deserving as thou dost a crown,
My cares shall never drag thee down."

(He had descried a maid whose line
Would hand her on much corn and wine,
And held her far in worth above
One who could only pray and love.)

But this Fair read him; whence he failed
To do the deed so blithely hailed;
He saw his projects wholly marred,
And gloom and want oppressed him hard;

Till, living to so mean an end,
Whereby he'd lost his every friend,
He perished in the pauper sty
Where his old mate lay dying nigh.

And moralists, reflecting, said,
As "dust to dust" anon was read
And echoed from each coffin-lid,
"These men were like in all they did."

1866.

LINES

Spoken by Miss Ada Rehan *at the Lyceum Theatre, July* 23, 1890, *at a performance on behalf of Lady Jeune's Holiday Fund for City Children.*

Before we part to alien thoughts and aims,
Permit the one brief word the occasion claims:
—When mumming and grave motives are allied,
Perhaps an Epilogue is justified.

Our under-purpose has, in truth, to-day
Commanded most our musings; least the play:
A purpose futile but for your good-will
Swiftly responsive to the cry of ill:
A purpose all too limited!— to aid
Frail human flowerets, sicklied by the shade,
In winning some short spell of upland breeze,
Or strengthening sunlight on the level leas.

Who has not marked, where the full cheek should be,
Incipient lines of lank flaccidity,
Lymphatic pallor where the pink should glow,
And where the throb of transport, pulses low?—
Most tragical of shapes from Pole to Line,
O wondering child, unwitting Time's design,
Why should Art add to Nature's quandary,
And worsen ill by thus immuring thee?
—That races do despite unto their own,
That Might supernal do indeed condone
Wrongs individual for the general ease,
Instance the proof in victims such as these.

Launched into thoroughfares too thronged before,
Mothered by those whose protest is "No more!"

Vitalized without option: who shall say
That did Life hang on choosing—Yea or Nay—
They had not scorned it with such penalty,
And nothingness implored of Destiny?

And yet behind the horizon smile serene
The down, the cornland, and the stretching green—
Space—the child's heaven: scenes which at least ensure
Some palliative for ill they cannot cure.

Dear friends—now moved by this poor show of ours
To make your own long joy in buds and bowers
For one brief while the joy of infant eyes,
Changing their urban murk to paradise—
You have our thanks!—may your reward include
More than our thanks, far more: their gratitude.

SAVILE CLUB, *Midnight, July* 1890.

"I LOOK INTO MY GLASS"

I LOOK into my glass,
And view my wasting skin,
And say, "Would God it came to pass
My heart had shrunk as thin!"

For then, I, undistrest
By hearts grown cold to me,
Could lonely wait my endless rest
With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,
Part steals, lets part abide;
And shakes this fragile frame at eve
With throbbings of noontide.

POEMS OF

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

PREFACE

HEREWITH I tender my thanks to the editors and proprietors of the *Times*, the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Westminster Gazette*, *Literature*, the *Graphic*, *Cornhill*, *Sphere*, and other papers, for permission to reprint from their pages such of the following pieces of verse as have already been published.

Of the subject-matter of this volume—even that which is in other than narrative form—much is dramatic or impersonative even where not explicitly so. Moreover, that portion which may be regarded as individual comprises a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates. It will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring. I do not greatly regret this. Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change.

T.H.

August 1901.

V.R. 1819–1901

A REVERIE

THE mightiest moments pass uncalendared,
And when the Absolute
In backward Time pronounced the deedful word
Whereby all life is stirred:
"Let one be born and throned whose mould shall constitute
The norm of every royal-reckoned attribute,"
No mortal knew or heard.

But in due days the purposed Life outshone—
Serene, sagacious, free;
—Her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds well done,
And the world's heart was won . . .
Yet may the deed of hers most bright in eyes to be
Lie hid from ours—as in the All-One's thought lay she—
Till ripening years have run.

SUNDAY NIGHT,
January 27, 1901.

WAR POEMS

EMBARCATION

(*Southampton Docks: October* 1899)

HERE, where Vespasian's legions struck the sands,
And Cerdic with his Saxons entered in,
And Henry's army leapt afloat to win
Convincing triumphs over neighbour lands,

Vaster battalions press for further strands,
To argue in the selfsame bloody mode
Which this late age of thought, and pact, and code,
Still fails to mend.—Now deckward tramp the bands,

Yellow as autumn leaves, alive as spring;
And as each host draws out upon the sea
Beyond which lies the tragical To-be,
None dubious of the cause, none murmuring,

Wives, sisters, parents, wave white hands and smile,
As if they knew not that they weep the while.

DEPARTURE

(*Southampton Docks: October* 1899)

WHILE the far farewell music thins and fails,
And the broad bottoms rip the bearing brine—
All smalling slowly to the gray sea-line—
And each significant red smoke-shaft pales,

Keen sense of severance everywhere prevails,
Which shapes the late long tramp of mounting men
To seeming words that ask and ask again:
"How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels

Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like these,
That are as puppets in a playing hand?—
When shall the saner softer polities
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?"

THE COLONEL'S SOLILOQUY

(*Southampton Docks: October* 1899)

"THE quay recedes. Hurrah! Ahead we go!
It's true I've been accustomed now to home,
And joints get rusty, and one's limbs may grow
More fit to rest than roam.

"But I can stand as yet fair stress and strain;
There's not a little steel beneath the rust;
My years mount somewhat, but here's to't again!
And if I fall, I must.

"God knows that for myself I have scanty care;
Past scrimmages have proved as much to all;
In Eastern lands and South I have had my share
Both of the blade and ball.

"And where those villains ripped me in the flitch
With their old iron in my early time,
I'm apt at change of wind to feel a twitch,
Or at a change of clime.

"And what my mirror shows me in the morning
Has more of blotch and wrinkle than of bloom;
My eyes, too, heretofore all glasses scorning,
Have just a touch of rheum. . . .

"Now sounds 'The Girl I've left behind me,'—Ah,
The years, the ardours, wakened by that tune!
Time was when, with the crowd's farewell 'Hurrah!'
'Twould lift me to the moon.

"But now it's late to leave behind me one
Who if, poor soul, her man goes underground,
Will not recover as she might have done
In days when hopes abound.

"She's waving from the wharfside, palely grieving,
As down we draw. . . . Her tears make little show,
Yet now she suffers more than at my leaving
Some twenty years ago!

"I pray those left at home will care for her;
I shall come back; I have before; though when
The Girl you leave behind you is a grandmother,
Things may not be as then."

THE GOING OF THE BATTERY

WIVES' LAMENT

(*November* 2, 1899)

I

O IT was sad enough, weak enough, mad enough—
Light in their loving as soldiers can be—
First to risk choosing them, leave alone losing them
Now, in far battle, beyond the South Sea! . . .

—Rain came down drenchingly; but we unblenchingly
Trudged on beside them through mirk and through mire,
They stepping steadily—only too readily!—
Scarce as if stepping brought parting-time nigher.

III

Great guns were gleaming there, living things seeming there,
Cloaked in their tar-cloths, upmouthed to the night;
Wheels wet and yellow from axle to felloe,
Throats blank of sound, but prophetic to sight.

IV

Gas-glimmers drearily, blearily, eerily
Lit our pale faces outstretched for one kiss,
While we stood prest to them, with a last quest to them
Not to court perils that honour could miss.

V

Sharp were those sighs of ours, blinded these eyes of ours,
When at last moved away under the arch
All we loved. Aid for them each woman prayed for them,
Treading back slowly the track of their march.

VI

Some one said: "Nevermore will they come: evermore
Are they now lost to us." O it was wrong!
Though may be hard their ways, some Hand will guard their ways,
Bear them through safely, in brief time or long.

VII

—Yet, voices haunting us, daunting us, taunting us,
Hint in the night-time when life beats are low
Other and graver things. . . . Hold we to braver things,
Wait we, in trust, what Time's fulness shall show.

AT THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON

(*Affixing the Lists of Killed and Wounded: December* 1899)

I

LAST year I called this world of gaingivings
The darkest thinkable, and questioned sadly
If my own land could heave its pulse less gladly,
So charged it seemed with circumstance that brings
The tragedy of things.

II

Yet at that censured time no heart was rent
Or feature blanched of parent, wife, or daughter
By hourly posted sheets of scheduled slaughter;
Death waited Nature's wont; Peace smiled unshent
From Ind to Occident.

A CHRISTMAS GHOST-STORY

SOUTH of the Line, inland from far Durban,
A mouldering soldier lies—your countryman.
Awry and doubled up are his gray bones,
And on the breeze his puzzled phantom moans
Nightly to clear Canopus: "I would know
By whom and when the All-Earth-gladdening Law
Of Peace, brought in by that Man Crucified,
Was ruled to be inept, and set aside?
And what of logic or of truth appears
In tacking 'Anno Domini' to the years?
Near twenty-hundred liveried thus have hied,
But tarries yet the Cause for which He died."

Christmas-eve 1899.

DRUMMER HODGE

I

THEY throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
Uncoffined—just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
That breaks the veldt around:
And foreign constellations west
Each night above his mound.

II

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—
Fresh from his Wessex home—
The meaning of the broad Karoo,
The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
Strange stars amid the gloam.

III

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.

A WIFE IN LONDON

(*December* 1899)

I

SHE sits in the tawny vapour
That the Thames-side lanes have uprolled,
Behind whose webby fold on fold
Like a waning taper
The street-lamp glimmers cold.

A messenger's knock cracks smartly,
Flashed news is in her hand
Of meaning it dazes to understand
Though shaped so shortly:
He—has fallen—in the far South Land. . . .

II

'Tis the morrow; the fog hangs thicker,
The postman nears and goes:
A letter is brought whose lines disclose
By the firelight flicker
His hand, whom the worm now knows:

Fresh—firm—penned in highest feather—
Page-full of his hoped return,
And of home-planned jaunts by brake and burn
In the summer weather,
And of new love that they would learn.

THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN

I

THE thick lids of Night closed upon me
Alone at the Bill
Of the Isle by the Race[1]—
Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face—
And with darkness and silence the spirit was on me
To brood and be still.

II

No wind fanned the flats of the ocean,
Or promontory sides,
Or the ooze by the strand,
Or the bent-bearded slope of the land,
Whose base took its rest amid everlong motion
Of criss-crossing tides.

III

Soon from out of the Southward seemed nearing
A whirr, as of wings
Waved by mighty-vanned flies,
Or by night-moths of measureless size,
And in softness and smoothness well-nigh beyond hearing
Of corporal things.

[1] The "Race" is the turbulent sea-area off the Bill of Portland, where contrary tides meet.

IV

And they bore to the bluff, and alighted—
A dim-discerned train
Of sprites without mould,
Frameless souls none might touch or might hold—
On the ledge by the turreted lantern, far-sighted
By men of the main.

And I heard them say "Home!" and I knew them
For souls of the felled
On the earth's nether bord
Under Capricorn, whither they'd warred,
And I neared in my awe, and gave heedfulness to them
With breathings inheld.

VI

Then, it seemed, there approached from the northward
A senior soul-flame
Of the like filmy hue:
And he met them and spake: "Is it you,
O my men?" Said they, "Aye! We bear homeward and hearthward
To feast on our fame!"

VII

"I've flown there before you," he said then:
"Your households are well;
But—your kin linger less
On your glory and war-mightiness
Than on dearer things."—"Dearer?" cried these from the dead then,
"Of what do they tell?"

VIII

"Some mothers muse sadly, and murmur
Your doings as boys—
Recall the quaint ways
Of your babyhood's innocent days.
Some pray that, ere dying, your faith had grown firmer,
And higher your joys.

IX

"A father broods: 'Would I had set him
To some humble trade,
And so slacked his high fire,
And his passionate martial desire;
And told him no stories to woo him and whet him
To this dire crusade!"

X

"And, General, how hold out our sweethearts,
Sworn loyal as doves?"
--"Many mourn; many think
It is not unattractive to prink
Them in sables for heroes. Some fickle and fleet hearts
Have found them new loves."

XI

"And our wives?" quoth another resignedly,
"Dwell they on our deeds?"
—"Deeds of home; that live yet
Fresh as dew—deeds of fondness or fret;
Ancient words that were kindly expressed or unkindly,
These, these have their heeds."

XII

—"Alas! then it seems that our glory
Weighs less in their thought
Than our old homely acts,
And the long-ago commonplace facts
Of our lives—held by us as scarce part of our story,
And rated as nought!"

XIII

Then bitterly some: "Was it wise now
To raise the tomb-door
For such knowledge? Away!"
But the rest: "Fame we prized till to-day;
Yet that hearts keep us green for old kindness we prize now
A thousand times more!"

XIV

Thus speaking, the trooped apparitions
Began to disband
And resolve them in two:
Those whose record was lovely and true
Bore to northward for home: those of bitter traditions
Again left the land,

XV

And, towering to seaward in legions,
They paused at a spot
Overbending the Race—
That engulphing, ghast, sinister place—
Whither headlong they plunged, to the fathomless regions
Of myriads forgot.

XVI

And the spirits of those who were homing
Passed on, rushingly,
Like the Pentecost Wind;
And the whirr of their wayfaring thinned
And surceased on the sky, and but left in the gloaming
Sea-mutterings and me.

December 1899.

SONG OF THE SOLDIERS' WIVES AND SWEETHEARTS

I

AT last! In sight of home again,
Of home again;
No more to range and roam again
As at that bygone time?
No more to go away from us
And stay from us?—
Dawn, hold not long the day from us,
But quicken it to prime!

II

Now all the town shall ring to them,
Shall ring to them,
And we who love them cling to them
And clasp them joyfully;
And cry, "O much we'll do for you
Anew for you,
Dear Loves!—aye, draw and hew for you,
Come back from oversea."

III

Some told us we should meet no more,
Yea, meet no more!—
Should wait, and wish, but greet no more
Your faces round our fires;
That, in a while, uncharily
And drearily
Men gave their lives—even wearily,
Like those whom living tires.

IV

And now you are nearing home again,
Dears, home again;
No more, may be, to roam again
As at that bygone time,
Which took you far away from us
To stay from us;
Dawn, hold not long the day from us,
But quicken it to prime!

THE SICK GOD

I

In days when men found joy in war,
A God of Battles sped each mortal jar;
The peoples pledged him heart and hand,
From Israel's land to isles afar.

II

His crimson form, with clang and chime,
Flashed on each murk and murderous meeting-time,
And kings invoked, for rape and raid,
His fearsome aid in rune and rhyme.

III

On bruise and blood-hole, scar and seam,
On blade and bolt, he flung his fulgid beam:
His haloes rayed the very gore,
And corpses wore his glory-gleam.

IV

Often an early King or Queen,
And storied hero onward, caught his sheen;
'Twas glimpsed by Wolfe, by Ney anon,
And Nelson on his blue demesne.

V

But new light spread. That god's gold nimb
And blazon have waned dimmer and more dim;
Even his flushed form begins to fade,
Till but a shade is left of him.

VI

That modern meditation broke
His spell, that penmen's pleadings dealt a stroke,
Say some; and some that crimes too dire
Did much to mire his crimson cloak.

VII

Yea, seeds of crescent sympathy
Were sown by those more excellent than he,
Long known, though long contemned till then—
The gods of men in amity.

VIII

Souls have grown seers, and thought outbrings
The mournful many-sidedness of things
With foes as friends, enfeebling ires
And fury-fires by gaingivings!

IX

He rarely gladdens champions now;
They do and dare, but tensely—pale of brow;
And would they fain uplift the arm
Of that weak form they know not how

X

Yet wars arise, though zest grows cold;
Wherefore, at times, as if in ancient mould
He looms, bepatched with paint and lath;
But never hath he seemed the old!

XI

Let men rejoice, let men deplore,
The lurid Deity of heretofore
Succumbs to one of saner nod;
The Battle-god is god no more.

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE

GENOA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

(*March* 1887)

O EPIC-FAMED, god-haunted Central Sea,
Heave careless of the deep wrong done to thee
When from Torino's track I saw thy face first flash on me.

And multimarbled Genoa the Proud,
Gleam all unconscious how, wide-lipped, up-browed,
I first beheld thee clad—not as the Beauty but the Dowd.

Out from a deep-delved way my vision lit
On housebacks pink, green, ochreous—where a slit
Shoreward 'twixt row and row revealed the classic blue through it.

And thereacross waved fishwives' high-hung smocks,
Chrome kerchiefs, scarlet hose, darned underfrocks;
Often since when my dreams of thee, O Queen, that frippery mocks:

Whereat I grieve, Superba! . . . Afterhours
Within Palazzo Doria's orange bowers
Went far to mend these marrings of thy soul-subliming powers.

But, Queen, such squalid undress none should see,
Those dream-endangering eyewounds no more be
Where lovers first behold thy form in pilgrimage to thee.

SHELLEY'S SKYLARK

(*The neighbourhood of Leghorn*: *March* 1887)

SOMEWHERE afield here something lies
In Earth's oblivious eyeless trust
That moved a poet to prophecies--
A pinch of unseen, unguarded dust:

The dust of the lark that Shelley heard,
And made immortal through times to be;—
Though it only lived like another bird,
And knew not its immortality:

Lived its meek life; then, one day, fell—
A little ball of feather and bone;
And how it perished, when piped farewell,
And where it wastes, are alike unknown.

Maybe it rests in the loam I view,
Maybe it throbs in a myrtle's green,
Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue
Of a grape on the slopes of yon inland scene.

Go find it, faeries, go and find
That tiny pinch of priceless dust,
And bring a casket silver-lined,
And framed of gold that gems encrust;

And we will lay it safe therein,
And consecrate it to endless time;
For it inspired a bard to win
Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme.

IN THE OLD THEATRE, FIESOLE

(*April* 1887)

I TRACED the Circus whose gray stones incline
Where Rome and dim Etruria interjoin,
Till came a child who showed an ancient coin
That bore the image of a Constantine.

She lightly passed; nor did she once opine
How, better than all books, she had raised for me
In swift perspective Europe's history
Through the vast years of Cæsar's sceptred line.

For in my distant plot of English loam
'Twas but to delve, and straightway there to find
Coins of like impress. As with one half blind
Whom common simples cure, her act flashed home
In that mute moment to my opened mind
The power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome.

ROME: ON THE PALATINE

(*April* 1887)

WE walked where Victor Jove was shrined awhile,
And passed to Livia's rich red mural show,
Whence, thridding cave and Criptoportico,
We gained Caligula's dissolving pile.

And each ranked ruin tended to beguile
The outer sense, and shape itself as though
It wore its marble gleams, its pristine glow
Of scenic frieze and pompous peristyle.

When lo, swift hands, on strings nigh overhead,
Began to melodize a waltz by Strauss:
It stirred me as I stood, in Cæsar's house,
Raised the old routs Imperial lyres had led,

And blended pulsing life with lives long done,
Till Time seemed fiction, Past and Present one.

ROME

BUILDING A NEW STREET IN THE ANCIENT QUARTER

(*April* 1887)

THESE umbered cliffs and gnarls of masonry
Outskeleton Time's central city, Rome;
Whereof each arch, entablature, and dome
Lies bare in all its gaunt anatomy.

And cracking frieze and rotten metope
Express, as though they were an open tome
Top-lined with caustic monitory gnome;
"Dunces, Learn here to spell Humanity!"

And yet within these ruins' very shade
The singing workmen shape and set and join
Their frail new mansion's stuccoed cove and quoin
With no apparent sense that years abrade,
Though each rent wall their feeble works invade
Once shamed all such in power of pier and groin.

ROME

THE VATICAN: SALA DELLE MUSE

(1887)

I SAT in the Muses' Hall at the mid of the day,
And it seemed to grow still, and the people to pass away,
And the chiselled shapes to combine in a haze of sun,
Till beside a Carrara column there gleamed forth One.

She looked not this nor that of those beings divine,
But each and the whole—an essence of all the Nine;
With tentative foot she neared to my halting-place,
A pensive smile on her sweet, small, marvellous face.

"Regarded so long, we render thee sad?" said she.
"Not you," sighed I, "but my own inconstancy!
I worship each and each; in the morning one,
And then, alas! another at sink of sun.

"To-day my soul clasps Form; but where is my troth
Of yesternight with Tune: can one cleave to both?"
—"Be not perturbed," said she. "Though apart in fame,
As I and my sisters are one, those, too, are the same."

—"But my love goes further—to Story, and Dance, and Hymn,
The lover of all in a sun-sweep is fool to whim—
Is swayed like a river-weed as the ripples run!"
—"Nay, wight, thou sway'st not. These are but phases of one;

"And that one is I; and I am projected from thee,
One that out of thy brain and heart thou causest to be—
Extern to thee nothing. Grieve not, nor thyself becall,
Woo where thou wilt; and rejoice thou canst love at all!"

ROME

AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS NEAR THE GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS

(1887)

WHO, then, was Cestius,
And what is he to me?—
Amid thick thoughts and memories multitudinous
One thought alone brings he.

I can recall no word
Of anything he did;
For me he is a man who died and was interred
To leave a pyramid

Whose purpose was exprest
Not with its first design,
Nor till, far down in Time, beside it found their rest
Two countrymen of mine.

Cestius in life, maybe,
Slew, breathed out threatening;
I know not. This I know: in death all silently
He does a finer thing,

In beckoning pilgrim feet
With marble finger high
To where, by shadowy wall and history-haunted street,
Those matchless singers lie. . . .

—Say, then, he lived and died
That stones which bear his name
Should mark, through Time, where two immortal Shades abide;
It is an ample fame.

LAUSANNE

IN GIBBON'S OLD GARDEN: 11-12 P.M.

June 27, 1897

(*The 110th anniversary of the completion of the "Decline and Fall" at the same hour and place*)

A SPIRIT seems to pass,
Formal in pose, but grave and grand withal:
He contemplates a volume stout and tall,
And far lamps fleck him through the thin acacias.

Anon the book is closed,
With "It is finished!" And at the alley's end
He turns, and when on me his glances bend
As from the Past comes speech—small, muted, yet composed.

"How fares the Truth now?—Ill?
—Do pens but slily further her advance?
May one not speed her but in phrase askance?
Do scribes aver the Comic to be Reverend still?

"Still rule those minds on earth
At whom sage Milton's wormwood words were hurled:
'*Truth like a bastard comes into the world
Never without ill-fame to him who gives her birth*'?"

ZERMATT

TO THE MATTERHORN

(*June-July* 1897)

THIRTY-TWO years since, up against the sun,
Seven shapes, thin atomies to lower sight,
Labouringly leapt and gained thy gabled height,
And four lives paid for what the seven had won.

They were the first by whom the deed was done,
And when I look at thee, my mind takes flight
To that day's tragic feat of manly might,
As though, till then, of history thou hadst none.

Yet ages ere men topped thee, late and soon
Thou didst behold the planets lift and lower;
Saw'st, maybe, Joshua's pausing sun and moon,
And the betokening sky when Cæsar's power
Approached its bloody end; yea, even that Noon
When darkness filled the earth till the ninth hour.

THE BRIDGE OF LODI[1]

(*Spring* 1887)

I

When of tender mind and body,
I was moved by minstrelsy,
And that air "The Bridge of Lodi"
Brought a strange delight to me.

II

In the battle-breathing jingle
Of its forward-footing tune
I could see the armies mingle,
And the columns cleft and hewn

III

On that far-famed spot by Lodi
Where Napoleon clove his way
To his fame, when like a god he
Bent the nations to his sway.

IV

Hence the tune came capering to me
While I traced the Rhone and Po;
Nor could Milan's Marvel woo me
From the spot englamoured so.

V

And to-day, sunlit and smiling,
Here I stand upon the scene,
With its saffron walls, dun tiling,
And its meads of maiden green,

[1] Pronounce "Loddy."

VI

Even as when the trackway thundered
With the charge of grenadiers,
And the blood of forty hundred
Splashed its parapets and piers. . . .

VII

Any ancient crone I'd toady
Like a lass in young-eyed prime,
Could she tell some tale of Lodi
At that moving mighty time.

VIII

So, I ask the wives of Lodi
For traditions of that day;
But, alas! not anybody
Seems to know of such a fray.

IX

And they heed but transitory
Marketings in cheese and meat,
Till I judge that Lodi's story
Is extinct in Lodi's street.

X

Yet while here and there they thrid them
In their zest to sell and buy,
Let me sit me down amid them
And behold those thousands die. .

XI

—Not a creature cares in Lodi
How Napoleon swept each arch,
Or where up and downward trod he,
Or for his outmatching March!

XII

So that wherefore should I be here,
Watching Adda lip the lea,
When the whole romance to see here
Is the dream I bring with me?

XIII

And why sing "The Bridge of Lodi"
As I sit thereon and swing,
When none shows by smile or nod he
Guesses why or what I sing? . . .

XIV

Since all Lodi, low and head ones,
Seem to pass that story by,
It may be the Lodi-bred ones
Rate it truly, and not I.

XV

Once engrossing Bridge of Lodi,
Is thy claim to glory gone?
Must I pipe a palinody,
Or be silent thereupon?

XVI

And if here, from strand to steeple,
Be no stone to fame the fight,
Must I say the Lodi people
Are but viewing war aright? . .

XVII

Nay; I'll sing "The Bridge of Lodi"—
That long-loved, romantic thing,
Though none show by smile or nod he
Guesses why and what I sing!

ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES

I

My ardours for emprize nigh lost
Since Life has bared its bones to me,
I shrink to seek a modern coast
Whose riper times have yet to be;
Where the new regions claim them free
From that long drip of human tears
Which peoples old in tragedy
Have left upon the centuried years.

II

For, wonning in these ancient lands,
Enchased and lettered as a tomb,
And scored with prints of perished hands,
And chronicled with dates of doom,
Though my own Being bear no bloom
I trace the lives such scenes enshrine,
Give past exemplars present room,
And their experience count as mine.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

THE MOTHER MOURNS

WHEN mid-autumn's moan shook the night-time,
    And sedges were horny,
And summer's green wonderwork faltered
    On leaze and in lane,

I fared Yell'ham-Firs way, where dimly
    Came wheeling around me
Those phantoms obscure and insistent
    That shadows unchain.

Till airs from the needle-thicks brought me
    A low lamentation,
As though from a tree-god disheartened,
    Perplexed, or in pain.

And, heeding, it awed me to gather
    That Nature herself there
Was breathing in aëry accents,
    With dirge-like refrain,

Weary plaint that Mankind, in these late days,
    Had grieved her by holding
Her ancient high fame of perfection
    In doubt and disdain. . . .

—"I had not proposed me a Creature
    (She soughed) so excelling
All else of my kingdom in compass
    And brightness of brain

"As to read my defects with a god-glance,
Uncover each vestige
Of old inadvertence, annunciate
Each flaw and each stain!

"My purpose went not to develop
Such insight in Earthland;
Such potent appraisements affront me,
And sadden my reign!

"Why loosened I olden control here
To mechanize skywards,
Undeeming great scope could outshape in
A globe of such grain?

"Man's mountings of mindsight I checked not,
Till range of his vision
Now tops my intent, and finds blemish
Throughout my domain.

"He holds as inept his own soul-shell—
My deftest achievement—
Contemns me for fitful inventions
Ill-timed and inane:

"No more sees my sun as a Sanct-shape,
My moon as the Night-queen,
My stars as august and sublime ones
That influences rain:

"Reckons gross and ignoble my teaching,
Immoral my story,
My love-lights a lure that my species
May gather and gain.

"'Give me,' he has said, 'but the matter
And means the gods lot her,
My brain could evolve a creation
More seemly, more sane.'

—"If ever a naughtiness seized me
To woo adulation
From creatures more keen than those crude ones
That first formed my train—

"If inly a moment I murmured,
'The simple praise sweetly,
But sweetlier the sage'—and did rashly
Man's vision unrein,

"I rue it! . . . His guileless forerunners,
Whose brains I could blandish,
To measure the deeps of my mysteries
Applied them in vain.

"From them my waste aimings and futile
I subtly could cover;
'Every best thing,' said they, 'to best purpose
Her powers preordain.'—

"No more such! . . . My species are dwindling,
My forests grow barren,
My popinjays fail from their tappings,
My larks from their strain.

"My leopardine beauties are rarer,
My tusky ones vanish,
My children have aped mine own slaughters
To quicken my wane.

"Let me grow, then, but mildews and mandrakes,
And slimy distortions,
Let nevermore things good and lovely
To me appertain;

"For Reason is rank in my temples,
And Vision unruly,
And chivalrous laud of my cunning
Is heard not again!"

"I SAID TO LOVE"

I SAID to Love,
"It is not now as in old days
When men adored thee and thy ways—
Set none above;
Named thee the Boy, the Bright, the One
Who spread a heaven beneath the sun,"
I said to Love.

I said to him,
"We now know more of thee than then;
We were but weak in judgment when,
With hearts abrim,
We clamoured thee that thou would'st please
Inflict on us thine agonies,"
I said to him.

I said to Love,
"Thou art not young, thou art not fair,
No elfin darts, no cherub air,
Nor swan, nor dove
Are thine; but features pitiless,
And iron daggers of distress,"
I said to Love.

"Depart then, Love! . . .
—Man's race shall perish, threatenest thou,
Without thy kindling coupling vow?
The age to come the man of now
Know nothing of?—
We fear not such a threat from thee;
We are too old in apathy!
Mankind shall cease.—So let it be,"
I said to Love.

A COMMONPLACE DAY

THE day is turning ghost,
And scuttles from the kalendar in fits and furtively,
To join the anonymous host
Of those that throng oblivion; ceding his place, maybe,
To one of like degree.

I part the fire-gnawed logs,
Rake forth the embers, spoil the busy flames, and lay the ends
Upon the shining dogs;
Further and further from the nooks the twilight's stride extends,
And beamless black impends.

Nothing of tiniest worth
Have I wrought, pondered, planned; no one thing asking blame or praise,
Since the pale corpse-like birth
Of this diurnal unit, bearing blanks in all its rays—
Dullest of dull-hued Days!

Wanly upon the panes
The rain slides, as have slid since morn my colourless thoughts; and yet
Here, while Day's presence wanes,
And over him the sepulchre-lid is slowly lowered and set,
He wakens my regret.

Regret—though nothing dear
That I wot of, was toward in the wide world at his prime,
Or bloomed elsewhere than here,
To die with his decease, and leave a memory sweet, sublime,
Or mark him out in Time. . . .

—Yet, maybe, in some soul,
In some spot undiscerned on sea or land, some impulse rose,
Or some intent upstole
Of that enkindling ardency from whose maturer glows
The world's amendment flows;

But which, benumbed at birth
By momentary chance or wile, has missed its hope to be
Embodied on the earth;
And undervoicings of this loss to man's futurity
May wake regret in me.

AT A LUNAR ECLIPSE

THY shadow, Earth, from Pole to Central Sea,
Now steals along upon the Moon's meek shine
In even monochrome and curving line
Of imperturbable serenity.

How shall I link such sun-cast symmetry
With the torn troubled form I know as thine,
That profile, placid as a brow divine,
With continents of moil and misery?

And can immense Mortality but throw
So small a shade, and Heaven's high human scheme
Be hemmed within the coasts yon arc implies?

Is such the stellar gauge of earthly show,
Nation at war with nation, brains that teem,
Heroes, and women fairer than the skies?

THE LACKING SENSE

SCENE.—*A sad-coloured landscape, Waddon Vale*

I

"O TIME, whence comes the Mother's moody look amid her labours,
As of one who all unwittingly has wounded where she loves?
Why weaves she not her world-webs to according lutes and tabors,
With nevermore this too remorseful air upon her face,
As of angel fallen from grace?"

II

—"Her look is but her story: construe not its symbols keenly:
In her wonderworks yea surely has she wounded where she loves.
The sense of ills misdealt for blisses blanks the mien most queenly,
Self-smitings kill self-joys; and everywhere beneath the sun
Such deeds her hands have done."

III

—"And how explains thy Ancient Mind her crimes upon her creatures,
These fallings from her fair beginnings, woundings where she loves,
Into her would-be perfect motions, modes, effects, and features
Admitting cramps, black humours, wan decay, and baleful blights,
Distress into delights?"

IV

—"Ah! knowest thou not her secret yet, her vainly veiled deficience,
Whence it comes that all unwittingly she wounds the lives she loves?
That sightless are those orbs of hers?—which bar to her omniscience
Brings those fearful unfulfilments, that red ravage through her zones
Whereat all creation groans.

V

"She whispers it in each pathetic strenuous slow endeavour,
When in mothering she unwittingly sets wounds on what she loves;
Yet her primal doom pursues her, faultful, fatal is she ever;
Though so deft and nigh to vision is her facile finger-touch
That the seers marvel much.

VI

"Deal, then, her groping skill no scorn, no note of malediction;
Not long on thee will press the hand that hurts the lives it loves;
And while she dares dead-reckoning on, in darkness of affliction,
Assist her where thy creaturely dependence can or may,
For thou art of her clay."

TO LIFE

O Life with the sad seared face,
I weary of seeing thee,
And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,
And thy too-forced pleasantry!

I know what thou would'st tell
Of Death, Time, Destiny—
I have known it long, and know, too, well
What it all means for me.

But canst thou not array
Thyself in rare disguise,
And feign like truth, for one mad day,
That Earth is Paradise?

I'll tune me to the mood,
And mumm with thee till eve;
And maybe what as interlude
I feign, I shall believe!

DOOM AND SHE

I

THERE dwells a mighty pair—
Slow, statuesque, intense—
Amid the vague Immense:
None can their chronicle declare,
Nor why they be, nor whence.

II

Mother of all things made,
Matchless in artistry,
Unlit with sight is she.—
And though her ever well-obeyed
Vacant of feeling he.

III

The Matron mildly asks—
A throb in every word—
"Our clay-made creatures, lord,
How fare they in their mortal tasks
Upon Earth's bounded bord?

IV

"The fate of those I bear,
Dear lord, pray turn and view,
And notify me true;
Shapings that eyelessly I dare
Maybe I would undo.

V

"Sometimes from lairs of life
Methinks I catch a groan,
Or multitudinous moan,
As though I had schemed a world of strife,
Working by touch alone."

VI

"World-weaver!" he replies,
"I scan all thy domain;
But since nor joy nor pain
It lies in me to recognize,
I read thy realms in vain.

VII

"World-weaver! what *is* Grief?
And what are Right, and Wrong,
And Feeling, that belong
To creatures all who owe thee fief?
Why is Weak worse than Strong?"

VIII

—So, baffled, curious, meek,
She broods in sad surmise. . . .
—Some say they have heard her sighs
On Alpine height or Polar peak
When the night tempests rise.

THE PROBLEM

SHALL we conceal the Case, or tell it—
We who believe the evidence?
Here and there the watch-towers knell it
With a sullen significance,
Heard of the few who hearken intently and carry an eagerly upstrained sense.

Hearts that are happiest hold not by it;
Better we hence let the old view reign:
Since there is peace in that, why decry it?
Since there is comfort, why disdain?
Note not the pigment, then, in that the painting determines humanity's joy and pain.

THE SUBALTERNS

I

"POOR wanderer," said the leaden sky,
"I fain would lighten thee,
But there be laws in force on high
Which say it must not be."

—"I would not freeze thee, shorn one," cried
The North, "knew I but how
To warm my breath, to slack my stride;
But I am ruled as thou."

III

—"To-morrow I attack thee, wight,"
Said Sickness. "Yet I swear
I bear thy little ark no spite,
But am bid enter there."

IV

—"Come hither, Son," I heard Death say;
"I did not will a grave
Should end thy pilgrimage to-day,
But I, too, am a slave!"

We smiled upon each other then,
And life to me wore less
Of that fell guise it wore ere when
They owned their passiveness.

THE SLEEP-WORKER

WHEN wilt thou wake, O Mother, wake and see—
As one who, held in trance, has laboured long
By vacant rote and prepossession strong—
The coils that thou hast wrought unwittingly;

Wherein have place, unrealized by thee,
Fair growths, foul cankers, right enmeshed with wrong,
Strange orchestras of victim-shriek and song,
And curious blends of ache and ecstasy?—

Should that morn come, and show thy opened eyes
All that Life's palpitating tissues feel,
How wilt thou bear thyself in thy surprise?—

Wilt thou destroy, in one wild shock of shame,
Thy whole high heaving firmamental frame,
Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal?

THE BULLFINCHES

BROTHER Bulleys, let us sing
From the dawn till evening!—
For we know not that we go not
When the day's pale pinions fold
Where those be that sang of old.

When I flew to Blackmoor Vale,
Whence the green-gowned faeries hail,
Roosting near them I could hear them
Speak of queenly Nature's ways,
Means, and moods,—well known to fays.

All we creatures, nigh and far
(Said they there), the Mother's are;
Yet she never shows endeavour
To protect from warrings wild
Bird or beast she calls her child.

Busy in her handsome house
Known as Space, she falls a-drowse;
Yet, in seeming, works on dreaming,
While beneath her groping hands
Fiends make havoc in her bands.

How her hussif'ry succeeds
She unknows or she unheeds,
All things making for Death's taking!
—So the green-gowned faeries say
Living over Blackmoor way.

Come then, brethren, let us sing,
From the dawn till evening!—
For we know not that we go not
When the day's pale pinions fold
Where those be that sang of old.

GOD-FORGOTTEN

I TOWERED far, and lo! I stood within
The presence of the Lord Most High,
Sent thither by the sons of Earth, to win
Some answer to their cry.

—"The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?
By Me created? Sad its lot?
Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:
Such world I fashioned not."—

—"O Lord, forgive me when I say
Thou spakest the word, and madest it all."—
"The Earth of men—let me bethink me. . . . Yea!
I dimly do recall

"Some tiny sphere I built long back
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)
So named . . . It perished, surely—not a wrack
Remaining, or a sign?

"It lost my interest from the first,
My aims therefor succeeding ill;
Haply it died of doing as it durst?"—
"Lord, it existeth still."—

"Dark, then, its life! For not a cry
Of aught it bears do I now hear;
Of its own act the threads were snapt whereby
Its plaints had reached mine ear.

"It used to ask for gifts of good,
Till came its severance, self-entailed,
When sudden silence on that side ensued,
And has till now prevailed.

"All other orbs have kept in touch;
Their voicings reach me speedily:
Thy people took upon them overmuch
In sundering them from me!

"And it is strange—though sad enough—
Earth's race should think that one whose call
Frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff
Must heed their tainted ball! . . .

"But sayest it is by pangs distraught,
And strife, and silent suffering?—
Sore grieved am I that injury should be wrought
Even on so poor a thing!

"Thou shouldst have learnt that *Not to Mend*
For Me could mean but *Not to Know*:
Hence, Messengers! and straightway put an end
To what men undergo." . .

Homing at dawn, I thought to see
One of the Messengers standing by.
—Oh, childish thought! . . . Yet often it comes to me
When trouble hovers nigh.

THE BEDRIDDEN PEASANT

TO AN UNKNOWN GOD

MUCH wonder I—here long low-laid—
That this dead wall should be
Betwixt the Maker and the made,
Between Thyself and me!

For, say one puts a child to nurse,
He eyes it now and then
To know if better it is, or worse,
And if it mourn, and when.

But Thou, Lord, givest us men our day
In helpless bondage thus
To Time and Chance, and seem'st straightway
To think no more of us!

That some disaster cleft Thy scheme
And tore us wide apart,
So that no cry can cross, I deem;
For Thou art mild of heart,

And wouldst not shape and shut us in
Where voice can not be heard:
Plainly Thou meant'st that we should win
Thy succour by a word.

Might but Thy sense flash down the skies
Like man's from clime to clime,
Thou wouldst not let me agonize
Through my remaining time;

But, seeing how much Thy creatures bear—
Lame, starved, or maimed, or blind—
Wouldst heal the ills with quickest care
Of me and all my kind.

Then, since Thou mak'st not these things be,
But these things dost not know,
I'll praise Thee as were shown to me
The mercies Thou wouldst show!

BY THE EARTH'S CORPSE

I

"O LORD, why grievest Thou?—
Since Life has ceased to be
Upon this globe, now cold
As lunar land and sea,
And humankind, and fowl, and fur
Are gone eternally,
All is the same to Thee as ere
They knew mortality."

II

"O Time," replied the Lord,
"Thou readest me ill, I ween;
Were all *the same*, I should not grieve
At that late earthly scene,

Now blestly past—though planned by me
With interest close and keen!—
Nay, nay: things now are *not* the same
As they have earlier been.

III

"Written indelibly
On my eternal mind
Are all the wrongs endured
By Earth's poor patient kind,
Which my too oft unconscious hand
Let enter undesigned.
No god can cancel deeds foredone,
Or thy old coils unwind!

IV

"As when, in Noë's days,
I whelmed the plains with sea,
So at this last, when flesh
And herb but fossils be,
And, all extinct, their piteous dust
Revolves obliviously,
That I made Earth, and life, and man,
It still repenteth me!"

MUTE OPINION

I

I TRAVERSED a dominion
Whose spokesmen spake out strong
Their purpose and opinion
Through pulpit, press, and song.
I scarce had means to note there
A large-eyed few, and dumb,
Who thought not as those thought there
That stirred the heat and hum.

II

When, grown a Shade, beholding
That land in lifetime trode,
To learn if its unfolding
Fulfilled its clamoured code,
I saw, in web unbroken,
Its history outwrought
Not as the loud had spoken,
But as the mute had thought.

TO AN UNBORN PAUPER CHILD

I

BREATHE not, hid Heart: cease silently,
And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,
Sleep the long sleep:
The Doomsters heap
Travails and teens around us here,
And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear.

II

Hark, how the peoples surge and sigh,
And laughters fail, and greetings die:
Hopes dwindle; yea,
Faiths waste away,
Affections and enthusiasms numb;
Thou canst not mend these things if thou dost come.

III

Had I the ear of wombèd souls
Ere their terrestrial chart unrolls,
And thou wert free
To cease, or be,
Then would I tell thee all I know,
And put it to thee: Wilt thou take Life so?

IV

Vain vow! No hint of mine may hence
To theeward fly: to thy locked sense
Explain none can
Life's pending plan:
Thou wilt thy ignorant entry make
Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake.

Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not
One tear, one qualm,
Should break the calm.
But I am weak as thou and bare;
No man can change the common lot to rare.

VI

Must come and bide. And such are we—
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary—
That I can hope
Health, love, friends, scope
In full for thee; can dream thou wilt find
Joys seldom yet attained by humankind!

TO FLOWERS FROM ITALY IN WINTER

SUNNED in the South, and here to-day;
—If all organic things
Be sentient, Flowers, as some men say,
What are your ponderings?

How can you stay, nor vanish quite
From this bleak spot of thorn,
And birch, and fir, and frozen white
Expanse of the forlorn?

Frail luckless exiles hither brought!
Your dust will not regain
Old sunny haunts of Classic thought
When you shall waste and wane;

But mix with alien earth, be lit
With frigid Boreal flame,
And not a sign remain in it
To tell man whence you came.

ON A FINE MORNING

I

WHENCE comes Solace?—Not from seeing
What is doing, suffering, being,
Not from noting Life's conditions,
Nor from heeding Time's monitions;
But in cleaving to the Dream,
And in gazing at the gleam
Whereby gray things golden seem.

II

Thus do I this heyday, holding
Shadows but as lights unfolding,
As no specious show this moment
With its iris-hued embowment;
But as nothing other than
Part of a benignant plan;
Proof that earth was made for man.

February 1899.

TO LIZBIE BROWNE

I

DEAR Lizbie Browne,
Where are you now?
In sun, in rain?—
Or is your brow
Past joy, past pain,
Dear Lizbie Browne?

II

Sweet Lizbie Browne
How you could smile,
How you could sing!—
How archly wile
In glance-giving,
Sweet Lizbie Browne!

III

And, Lizbie Browne,
Who else had hair
Bay-red as yours,
Or flesh so fair
Bred out of doors,
Sweet Lizbie Browne?

IV

When, Lizbie Browne,
You had just begun
To be endeared
By stealth to one,
You disappeared
My Lizbie Browne!

Ay, Lizbie Browne,
So swift your life,
And mine so slow,
You were a wife
Ere I could show
Love, Lizbie Browne.

VI

Still, Lizbie Browne,
You won, they said,
The best of men
When you were wed. . .
Where went you then,
O Lizbie Browne?

VII

Dear Lizbie Browne,
I should have thought,
"Girls ripen fast,"
And coaxed and caught
You ere you passed,
Dear Lizbie Browne!

VIII

But, Lizbie Browne,
I let you slip;
Shaped not a sign;
Touched never your lip
With lip of mine,
Lost Lizbie Browne!

IX

So, Lizbie Browne,
When on a day
Men speak of me
As not, you'll say,
"And who was he?"—
Yes, Lizbie Browne!

SONG OF HOPE

O SWEET To-morrow!—
After to-day
There will away
This sense of sorrow.
Then let us borrow
Hope, for a gleaming
Soon will be streaming,
Dimmed by no gray—
No gray!

While the winds wing us
Sighs from The Gone,
Nearer to dawn
Minute-beats bring us;
When there will sing us
Larks, of a glory
Waiting our story
Further anon—
Anon!

Doff the black token,
Don the red shoon,
Right and retune
Viol-strings broken:
Null the words spoken
In speeches of rueing,
The night cloud is hueing,
To-morrow shines soon—
Shines soon!

THE WELL-BELOVED

I WENT by star and planet shine
Towards the dear one's home
At Kingsbere, there to make her mine
When the next sun upclomb.

I edged the ancient hill and wood
Beside the Ikling Way,
Nigh where the Pagan temple stood
In the world's earlier day.

And as I quick and quicker walked
On gravel and on green,
I sang to sky, and tree, or talked
Of her I called my queen.

—"O faultless is her dainty form,
And luminous her mind;
She is the God-created norm
Of perfect womankind!"

A shape whereon one star-blink gleamed
Glode softly by my side,
A woman's; and her motion seemed
The motion of my bride.

And yet methought she'd drawn erstwhile
Out from the ancient leaze,
Where once were pile and peristyle
For Love's idolatries.

—"O maiden lithe and lone, what may
Thy name and lineage be
Who so resemblest by this ray
My darling?—Art thou she?"

The Shape: "Thy bride remains within
Her father's grange and grove."
—"Thou speakest rightly," I broke in,
"Thou art not she I love."

—"Nay: though thy bride remains inside
Her father's walls," said she,
"The one most dear is with thee here,
For thou dost love but me."

Then I: "But she, my only choice,
Is now at Kingsbere Grove?"
Again her soft mysterious voice·
"I am thy only Love."

Thus still she vouched, and still I said,
"O sprite, that cannot be!" . . .
It was as if my bosom bled,
So much she troubled me.

The sprite resumed: "Thou hast transferred
To her dull form awhile
My beauty, fame, and deed, and word,
My gestures and my smile.

"O fatuous man, this truth infer,
Brides are not what they seem;
Thou lovest what thou dreamest her;
I am thy very dream!"

—"O then," I answered miserably,
Speaking as scarce I knew,
"My loved one, I must wed with thee
If what thou sayest be true!"

She, proudly, thinning in the gloom:
"Though, since troth-plight began,
I have ever stood as bride to groom,
I wed no mortal man!"

Thereat she vanished by the lane
Adjoining Kingsbere town,
Near where, men say, once stood the Fane
To Venus, on the Down.

—When I arrived and met my bride
Her look was pinched and thin,
As if her soul had shrunk and died,
And left a waste within.

HER REPROACH

CON the dead page as 'twere live love: press on.
Cold wisdom's words will ease thy track for thee;
Aye, go; cast off sweet ways, and leave me wan
To biting blasts that are intent on me.

But if thy object Fame's far summits be,
Whose inclines many a skeleton overlies
That missed both dream and substance, stop and see
How absence wears these cheeks and dims these eyes!

It surely is far sweeter and more wise
To water love, than toil to leave anon
A name whose glory-gleam will but advise
Invidious minds to dull it with their own,

And over which the kindliest will but stay
A moment; musing, "He, too, had his day!"

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1867.

THE INCONSISTENT

I SAY, "She was as good as fair!"
When standing by her mound;
"Such passing sweetness," I declare,
"No longer treads the ground."
I say, "What living Love can catch
Her bloom and bonhomie,
And what in recent maidens match
Her olden warmth to me!"

—There stands within yon vestry-nook
Where bonded lovers sign,
Her name upon a faded book
With one that is not mine.
To him she breathed the tender vow
She once had breathed to me,
But yet I say, "O Love, even now
Would I had died for thee!"

A BROKEN APPOINTMENT

You did not come,
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb.–
Yet less for loss of your dear presence there
Than that I thus found lacking in your make
That high compassion which can overbear
Reluctance for pure lovingkindness' sake
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,
You did not come.

You love not me,
And love alone can lend you loyalty;
—I know and knew it. But, unto the store
Of human deeds divine in all but name,
Was it not worth a little hour or more
To add yet this: Once you, a woman, came
To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be
You love not me?

"BETWEEN US NOW"

Between us now and here—
Two thrown together
Who are not wont to wear
Life's flushest feather—
Who see the scenes slide past,
The daytimes dimming fast,
Let there be truth at last,
Even if despair.

So thoroughly and long
Have you now known me,
So real in faith and strong
Have I now shown me,
That nothing needs disguise
Further in any wise,
Or asks or justifies
A guarded tongue.

Face unto face, then, say,
Eyes mine own meeting,
Is your heart far away,
Or with mine beating?
When false things are brought low,
And swift things have grown slow,
Feigning like froth shall go,
Faith be for aye.

"HOW GREAT MY GRIEF"

(TRIOLET)

How great my grief, my joys how few,
Since first it was my fate to know thee!
—Have the slow years not brought to view
How great my grief, my joys how few,
Nor memory shaped old times anew,
Nor loving-kindness helped to show thee
How great my grief, my joys how few,
Since first it was my fate to know thee?

"I NEED NOT GO"

I NEED not go
Through sleet and snow
To where I know
She waits for me;
She will wait me there
Till I find it fair,
And have time to spare
From company.

When I've overgot
The world somewhat,
When things cost not
Such stress and strain,
Is soon enough
By cypress sough
To tell my Love
I am come again.

And if some day,
When none cries nay,
I still delay
To seek her side,
(Though ample measure
Of fitting leisure
Await my pleasure)
She will not chide.

What—not upbraid me
That I delayed me,
Nor ask what stayed me
So long? Ah, no!—
New cares may claim me,
New loves inflame me,
She will not blame me,
But suffer it so.

THE COQUETTE, AND AFTER

(TRIOLETS)

I

For long the cruel wish I knew
That your free heart should ache for me
While mine should bear no ache for you;
For long—the cruel wish!—I knew
How men can feel, and craved to view
My triumph—fated not to be
For long! . . . The cruel wish I knew
That your free heart should ache for me!

II

At last one pays the penalty—
The woman—women always do.
My farce, I found, was tragedy
At last!—One pays the penalty
With interest when one, fancy-free,
Learns love, learns shame. . . . Of sinners two
At last *one* pays the penalty—
The woman—women always do!

A SPOT

In years defaced and lost,
Two sat here, transport-tossed,
Lit by a living love
The wilted world knew nothing of:
Scared momently
By gaingivings,
Then hoping things
That could not be. . . .

Of love and us no trace
Abides upon the place;
The sun and shadows wheel,
Season and season sereward steal;
Foul days and fair
Here, too, prevail,
And gust and gale
As everywhere.

But lonely shepherd souls
Who bask amid these knolls
May catch a faery sound
On sleepy noontides from the ground:
"O not again
Till Earth outwears
Shall love like theirs
Suffuse this glen!"

LONG PLIGHTED

Is it worth while, dear, now,
To call for bells, and sally forth arrayed
For marriage-rites—discussed, descried, delayed
So many years?

Is it worth while, dear, now,
To stir desire for old fond purposings,
By feints that Time still serves for dallyings,
Though quittance nears?

Is it worth while, dear, when
The day being so far spent, so low the sun,
The undone thing will soon be as the done,
And smiles as tears?

Is it worth while, dear, when
Our cheeks are worn, our early brown is gray;
When, meet or part we, none says yea or nay,
Or heeds, or cares?

Is it worth while, dear, since
We still can climb old Yell'ham's wooded mounds
Together, as each season steals its rounds
And disappears?

Is it worth while, dear, since
As mates in Mellstock churchyard we can lie,
Till the last crash of all things low and high
Shall end the spheres?

THE WIDOW BETROTHED

I PASSED the lodge and avenue
To her fair tenement,
And sunset on her window-panes
Reflected our intent.

The creeper on the gable nigh
  Was fired to more than red,
And when I came to halt thereby
  "Bright as my joy!" I said.

Of late days it had been her aim
  To meet me in the hall;
Now at my footsteps no one came,
  And no one to my call.

Again I knocked, and tardily
  An inner tread was heard,
And I was shown her presence then
  With a mere answering word.

She met me, and but barely took
  My proffered warm embrace;
Preoccupation weighed her look,
  And hardened her sweet face.

"To-morrow—could you—would you call?
  Abridge your present stay?
My child is ill—my one, my all!—
  And can't be left to-day."

And then she turns, and gives commands
  As I were out of sound,
Or were no more to her and hers
  Than any neighbour round. . . .

—As maid I loved her; but one came
  And pleased, and coaxed, and wooed.
And when in time he wedded her
  I deemed her gone for good.

He won, I lost her; and my loss
  I bore I know not how;
But I do think I suffered then
  Less wretchedness than now.

For Time, in taking him, unclosed
  An unexpected door
Of bliss for me, which grew to seem
  Far surer than before.

Yet in my haste I overlooked
When secondly I sued
That then, as not at first, she had learnt
The call of motherhood. . . .

Her word is steadfast, and I know
How firmly pledged are we:
But a new love-claim shares her since
She smiled as maid on me!

AT A HASTY WEDDING

(TRIOLET)

If hours be years the twain are blest,
For now they solace swift desire
By bonds of every bond the best,
If hours be years. The twain are blest
Do eastern stars slope never west,
Nor pallid ashes follow fire:
If hours be years the twain are blest,
For now they solace swift desire.

THE DREAM-FOLLOWER

A DREAM of mine flew over the mead
To the halls where my old Love reigns;
And it drew me on to follow its lead:
And I stood at her window-panes;

And I saw but a thing of flesh and bone
Speeding on to its cleft in the clay;
And my dream was scared, and expired on a moan,
And I whitely hastened away.

HIS IMMORTALITY

I

I SAW a dead man's finer part
Shining within each faithful heart
Of those bereft. Then said I: "This must be
His immortality."

II

I looked there as the seasons wore,
And still his soul continuously bore
A life in theirs. But less its shine excelled
Than when I first beheld.

III

His fellow-yearsmen passed, and then
In later hearts I looked for him again;
And found him—shrunk, alas! into a thin
And spectral mannikin.

IV

Lastly I ask—now old and chill—
If aught of him remain unperished still;
And find, in me alone, a feeble spark,
Dying amid the dark.

February 1899.

THE TO-BE-FORGOTTEN

I

I HEARD a small sad sound,
And stood awhile among the tombs around:
"Wherefore, old friends," said I, "are you distrest,
Now, screened from life's unrest?"

II

—"O not at being here;
But that our future second death is near;
When, with the living, memory of us numbs,
And blank oblivion comes!

III

"These, our sped ancestry,
Lie here embraced by deeper death than we;
Nor shape nor thought of theirs can you descry
With keenest backward eye.

IV

"They count as quite forgot;
They are as men who have existed not;
Theirs is a loss past loss of fitful breath;
It is the second death.

V

"We here, as yet, each day
Are blest with dear recall; as yet, can say
We hold in some soul loved continuance
Of shape and voice and glance.

VI

"But what has been will be—
First memory, then oblivion's swallowing sea;
Like men foregone, shall we merge into those
Whose story no one knows.

VII

"For which of us could hope
To show in life that world-awakening scope
Granted the few whose memory none lets die,
But all men magnify?

VIII

"We were but Fortune's sport;
Things true, things lovely, things of good report
We neither shunned nor sought . . . We see our bourne,
And seeing it we mourn."

WIVES IN THE SERE

I

NEVER a careworn wife but shows,
If a joy suffuse her,
Something beautiful to those
Patient to peruse her,
Some one charm the world unknows
Precious to a muser,
Haply what, ere years were foes,
Moved her mate to choose her.

II

But, be it a hint of rose
 That an instant hues her,
Or some early light or pose
 Wherewith thought renews her—
Seen by him at full, ere woes
 Practised to abuse her—
Sparely comes it, swiftly goes,
 Time again subdues her.

THE SUPERSEDED

I

As newer comers crowd the fore,
 We drop behind.
—We who have laboured long and sore
 Times out of mind,
And keen are yet, must not regret
 To drop behind.

II

Yet there are of us some who grieve
 To go behind;
Staunch, strenuous souls who scarce believe
 Their fires declined,
And know none spares, remembers, cares
 Who go behind.

III

'Tis not that we have unforetold
 The drop behind;
We feel the new must oust the old
 In every kind;
But yet we think, must we, must *we*,
 Too, drop behind?

AN AUGUST MIDNIGHT

I

A SHADED lamp and a waving blind,
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
On this scene enter—winged, horned, and spined—
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
While 'mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands . . .

II

Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space.
—My guests besmear my new-penned line,
Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
"God's humblest, they!" I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.

MAX GATE, 1899.

THE CAGED THRUSH FREED AND HOME AGAIN

(VILLANELLE)

"MEN know but little more than we,
Who count us least of things terrene,
How happy days are made to be!

"Of such strange tidings what think ye,
O birds in brown that peck and preen?
Men know but little more than we!

"When I was borne from yonder tree
In bonds to them, I hoped to glean
How happy days are made to be,

"And want and wailing turned to glee;
Alas, despite their mighty mien
Men know but little more than we!

"They cannot change the Frost's decree,
They cannot keep the skies serene;
How happy days are made to be

"Eludes great Man's sagacity
No less than ours, O tribes in treen!
Men know but little more than we
How happy days are made to be."

BIRDS AT WINTER NIGHTFALL

(TRIOLET)

AROUND the house the flakes fly faster,
And all the berries now are gone
From holly and cotoneaster
Around the house. The flakes fly!—faster
Shutting indoors that crumb-outcaster
We used to see upon the lawn
Around the house. The flakes fly faster,
And all the berries now are gone!

MAX GATE.

THE PUZZLED GAME-BIRDS

(TRIOLET)

THEY are not those who used to feed us
When we were young—they cannot be—
These shapes that now bereave and bleed us?
They are not those who used to feed us,
For did we then cry, they would heed us.
—If hearts can house such treachery
They are not those who used to feed us
When we were young—they cannot be!

WINTER IN DURNOVER FIELD

SCENE.—*A wide stretch of fallow ground recently sown with wheat, and frozen to iron hardness. Three large birds walking about thereon, and wistfully eyeing the surface. Wind keen from north-east: sky a dull grey.*

(TRIOLET)

Rook.—Throughout the field I find no grain;
 The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!
Starling.—Aye: patient pecking now is vain
 Throughout the field, I find . . .
Rook.— No grain!
Pigeon.—Nor will be, comrade, till it rain,
 Or genial thawings loose the lorn land
 Throughout the field.
Rook.— I find no grain:
 The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!

THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM

WHY should this flower delay so long
 To show its tremulous plumes?
Now is the time of plaintive robin-song,
 When flowers are in their tombs.

Through the slow summer, when the sun
 Called to each frond and whorl
That all he could for flowers was being done,
 Why did it not uncurl?

It must have felt that fervid call
 Although it took no heed,
Waking but now, when leaves like corpses fall,
 And saps all retrocede.

Too late its beauty, lonely thing,
 The season's shine is spent,
Nothing remains for it but shivering
 In tempests turbulent.

Had it a reason for delay,
 Dreaming in witlessness
That for a bloom so delicately gay
 Winter would stay its stress?

—I talk as if the thing were born
With sense to work its mind;
Yet it is but one mask of many worn
By the Great Face behind.

THE DARKLING THRUSH

I LEANT upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings from broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice burst forth among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

December 1900.

THE COMET AT YALBURY OR YELL'HAM

I

It bends far over Yell'ham Plain,
   And we, from Yell'ham Height,
Stand and regard its fiery train,
   So soon to swim from sight.

II

It will return long years hence, when
   As now its strange swift shine
Will fall on Yell'ham ; but not then
   On that sweet form of thine.

MAD JUDY

When the hamlet hailed a birth
   Judy used to cry :
When she heard our christening mirth
   She would kneel and sigh.
She was crazed, we knew, and we
Humoured her infirmity.

When the daughters and the sons
   Gathered them to wed,
And we like-intending ones
   Danced till dawn was red,
She would rock and mutter, "More
Comers to this stony shore!"

When old Headsman Death laid hands
   On a babe or twain,
She would feast, and by her brands
   Sing her songs again.
What she liked we let her do,
Judy was insane, we knew.

A WASTED ILLNESS

THROUGH vaults of pain,
Enribbed and wrought with groins of ghastliness,
I passed, and garish spectres moved my brain
To dire distress.

And hammerings,
And quakes, and shoots, and stifling hotness, blent
With webby waxing things and waning things
As on I went.

"Where lies the end
To this foul way?" I asked with weakening breath.
Thereon ahead I saw a door extend—
The door to Death.

It loomed more clear:
"At last!" I cried. "The all-delivering door!"
And then, I knew not how, it grew less near
Than theretofore.

And back slid I
Along the galleries by which I came,
And tediously the day returned, and sky,
And life—the same.

And all was well:
Old circumstance resumed its former show,
And on my head the dews of comfort fell
As ere my woe.

I roam anew,
Scarce conscious of my late distress. . . . And yet
Those backward steps to strength I cannot view
Without regret.

For that dire train
Of waxing shapes and waning, passed before,
And those grim chambers, must be ranged again
To reach that door.

A MAN

(IN MEMORY OF H. OF M.)

I

IN Casterbridge there stood a noble pile,
Wrought with pilaster, bay, and balustrade
In tactful times when shrewd Eliza swayed.—
On burgher, squire, and clown
It smiled the long street down for near a mile.

II

But evil days beset that domicile;
The stately beauties of its roof and wall
Passed into sordid hands. Condemned to fall
Were cornice, quoin, and cove,
And all that art had wove in antique style.

III

Among the hired dismantlers entered there
One till the moment of his task untold.
When charged therewith he gazed, and answered bold:
"Be needy I or no,
I will not help lay low a house so fair!

IV

"Hunger is hard. But since the terms be such—
No wage, or labour stained with the disgrace
Of wrecking what our age cannot replace
To save its tasteless soul—
I'll do without your dole. Life is not much!"

V

Dismissed with sneers he backed his tools and went,
And wandered workless; for it seemed unwise
To close with one who dared to criticize
And carp on points of taste:
Rude men should work where placed, and be content.

VI

Years whiled. He aged, sank, sickened; and was not:
And it was said, "A man intractable
And curst is gone." None sighed to hear his knell,
None sought his churchyard-place;
His name, his rugged face, were soon forgot.

VII

The stones of that fair hall lie far and wide,
And but a few recall its ancient mould;
Yet when I pass the spot I long to hold
As truth what fancy saith:
"His protest lives where deathless things abide!"

THE DAME OF ATHELHALL

I

"DEAR! Shall I see thy face," she said,
"In one brief hour?
And away with thee from a loveless bed
To a far-off sun, to a vine-wrapt bower,
And be thine own unseparated,
And challenge the world's white glower?"

II

She quickened her feet, and met him where
They had predesigned:
And they clasped, and mounted, and cleft the air
Upon whirling wheels; till the will to bind
Her life with his made the moments there
Efface the years behind.

III

Miles slid, and the port uprose to view
As they sped on;
When slipping its bond the bracelet flew
From her fondled arm. Replaced anon,
Its cameo of the abjured one drew
Her musings thereupon.

IV

The gaud with his image once had been
A gift from him:
And so it was that its carving keen
Refurbished memories wearing dim,
Which set in her soul a twinge of teen,
And a tear on her lashes' brim.

V

"I may not go!" she at length outspake,
"Thoughts call me back—
I would still lose all for your dear, true sake;
My heart is thine, friend! But my track
Home, home to Athelhall I must take
To hinder household wrack!"

VI

He was wroth. And they parted, weak and wan;
And he left the shore;
His ship diminished, was low, was gone;
And she heard in the waves as the daytide wore,
And read in the leer of the sun that shone,
That they parted for evermore.

VII

She homed as she came, at the dip of eve
On Athel Coomb
Regaining the Hall she had sworn to leave.
The house was soundless as a tomb,
And she stole to her chamber, there to grieve
Lone, kneeling, in the gloom.

VIII

From the lawn without rose her husband's voice
To one his friend:
"Another her Love, another my choice,
Her going is good. Our conditions mend;
In a change of mates we shall both rejoice;
I hoped that it thus might end!

IX

"A quick divorce; she will make him hers,
And I wed mine.
So Time rights all things in long, long years—
Or rather she, by her bold design!
I admire a woman no balk deters:
She has blessed my life, in fine.

X

"I shall build new rooms for my new true bride,
Let the bygone be:
By now, no doubt, she has crossed the tide
With the man to her mind. Far happier she
In some warm vineland by his side
Than ever she was with me."

THE SEASONS OF HER YEAR

I

WINTER is white on turf and tree,
And birds are fled;
But summer songsters pipe to me,
And petals spread,
For what I dreamt of secretly
His lips have said!

II

O 'tis a fine May morn, they say,
And blooms have blown;
But wild and wintry is my day,
My birds make moan;
For he who vowed leaves me to pay
Alone—alone!

THE MILKMAID

UNDER a daisied bank
There stands a rich red ruminating cow,
And hard against her flank
A cotton-hooded milkmaid bends her brow.

The flowery river-ooze
Upheaves and falls; the milk purrs in the pail;
Few pilgrims but would choose
The peace of such a life in such a vale.

The maid breathes words—to vent,
It seems, her sense of Nature's scenery,
Of whose life, sentiment,
And essence, very part itself is she.

She bends a glance of pain,
And, at a moment, lets escape a tear;
Is it that passing train,
Whose alien whirr offends her country ear?—

Nay! Phyllis does not dwell
On visual and familiar things like these;
What moves her is the spell
Of inner themes and inner poetries:

Could but by Sunday morn
Her gay new gown come, meads might dry to dun,
Trains shriek till ears were torn,
If Fred would not prefer that Other One.

THE LEVELLED CHURCHYARD

"O PASSENGER, pray list and catch
Our sighs and piteous groans,
Half stifled in this jumbled patch
Of wrenched memorial stones!

"We late-lamented, resting here,
Are mixed to human jam,
And each to each exclaims in fear,
'I know not which I am!'

"The wicked people have annexed
The verses on the good;
A roaring drunkard sports the text
Teetotal Tommy should!

"Where we are huddled none can trace,
And if our names remain,
They pave some path or p—ing place
Where we have never lain!

"Here's not a modest maiden elf
But dreads the final Trumpet,
Lest half of her should rise herself,
And half some local strumpet!

"From restorations of Thy fane,
From smoothings of Thy sward,
From zealous Churchmen's pick and plane
Deliver us O Lord! Amen!"

1882.

THE RUINED MAID

"O 'MELIA, my dear, this does everything crown!
Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?
And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?"—
"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?" said she.

—"You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;
And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!"—
"Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined," said she.

—"At home in the barton you said 'thee' and 'thou,'
And 'thik oon,' and 'theas oon,' and 't'other'; but now
Your talking quite fits 'ee for high compa-ny!"—
"Some polish is gained with one's ruin," said she.

—"Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak
But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,
And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!"—
"We never do work when we're ruined," said she.

—"You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock; but at present you seem
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly!"—
"True. One's pretty lively when ruined," said she.

—"I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!"—
"My dear—a raw country girl, such as you be,
Cannot quite expect that. You ain't ruined," said she.

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1866.

THE RESPECTABLE BURGHER

ON "THE HIGHER CRITICISM"

SINCE Reverend Doctors now declare
That clerks and people must prepare
To doubt if Adam ever were;
To hold the flood a local scare;
To argue, though the stolid stare,
That everything had happened ere
The prophets to its happening sware;
That David was no giant-slayer,
Nor one to call a God-obeyer
In certain details we could spare,
But rather was a debonair
Shrewd bandit, skilled as banjo-player:
That Solomon sang the fleshly Fair,
And gave the Church no thought whate'er,
That Esther with her royal wear,
And Mordecai, the son of Jair,
And Joshua's triumphs, Job's despair,
And Balaam's ass's bitter blare;
Nebuchadnezzar's furnace-flare,
And Daniel and the den affair,
And other stories rich and rare,
Were writ to make old doctrine wear
Something of a romantic air:
That the Nain widow's only heir,
And Lazarus with cadaverous glare
(As done in oils by Piombo's care)
Did not return from Sheol's lair:
That Jael set a fiendish snare,
That Pontius Pilate acted square,

That never a sword cut Malchus' ear;
And (but for shame I must forbear)
That —— —— did not reappear! . . .
—Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
All churchgoing will I forswear,
And sit on Sundays in my chair,
And read that moderate man Voltaire.

ARCHITECTURAL MASKS

I

THERE is a house with ivied walls,
And mullioned windows worn and old,
And the long dwellers in those halls
Have souls that know but sordid calls,
And daily dote on gold.

II

In blazing brick and plated show
Not far away a "villa" gleams,
And here a family few may know,
With book and pencil, viol and bow,
Lead inner lives of dreams.

III

The philosophic passers say,
"See that old mansion mossed and fair,
Poetic souls therein are they:
And O that gaudy box! Away,
You vulgar people there."

THE TENANT-FOR-LIFE

THE sun said, watching my watering-pot:
"Some morn you'll pass away;
These flowers and plants I parch up hot—
Who'll water them that day?

"Those banks and beds whose shape your eye
Has planned in line so true,
New hands will change, unreasoning why
Such shape seemed best to you.

"Within your house will strangers sit,
And wonder how first it came;
They'll talk of their schemes for improving it,
And will not mention your name.

"They'll care not how, or when, or at what
You sighed, laughed, suffered here,
Though you feel more in an hour of the spot
Than they will feel in a year.

"As I look on at you here, now,
Shall I look on at these;
But as to our old times, avow
No knowledge—hold my peace! . . .

"O friend, it matters not, I say;
Bethink ye, I have shined
On nobler ones than you, and they
Are dead men out of mind!"

THE KING'S EXPERIMENT

It was a wet wan hour in spring,
And Nature met King Doom beside a lane,
Wherein Hodge trudged, all blithely ballading
The Mother's smiling reign.

"Why warbles he that skies are fair
And coombs alight," she cried, "and fallows gay,
When I have placed no sunshine in the air
Or glow on earth to-day?"

"'Tis in the comedy of things
That such should be," returned the one of Doom;
"Charge now the scene with brightest blazonings,
And he shall call them gloom."

She gave the word: the sunbeams broke,
All Froomside shone, the hedgebirds raised a song;
And later Hodge, upon the midday stroke,
Returned the lane along,

Low murmuring: "O this bitter scene,
And thrice accurst horizon hung with gloom!
How deadly like this sky, these fields, these treen,
To trappings of the tomb!"

The Beldame then: "The fool and blind!
Such mad perverseness who may apprehend?"—
"Nay; there's no madness in it; thou shalt find
Thy law there," said her friend.

"When Hodge went forth 'twas to his Love,
To make her, ere this eve, his wedded prize,
And Earth, despite the heaviness above,
Was bright as Paradise.

"But I sent on my messenger,
With cunning arrows poisonous and keen,
To take forthwith her laughing life from her,
And dull her little een,

"And white her cheek, and still her breath,
Ere her too buoyant Hodge had reached her side;
So, when he came, he clasped her but in death,
And never as his bride.

"And there's the humour, as I said;
Thy dreary dawn he saw as gleaming gold,
And in thy glistening green and radiant red
Funereal gloom and cold."

THE TREE

AN OLD MAN'S STORY

I

ITS roots are bristling in the air
Like some mad Earth-god's spiny hair;
The loud south-wester's swell and yell
Smote it at midnight, and it fell.
Thus ends the tree
Where Some One sat with me.

II

Its boughs, which none but darers trod,
A child may step on from the sod,
And twigs that earliest met the dawn
Are lit the last upon the lawn.
        Cart off the tree
        Beneath whose trunk sat we!

III

Yes, there we sat: she cooed content,
And bats ringed round, and daylight went;
The gnarl, our seat, is wrenched and sunk,
Prone that queer pocket in the trunk
        Where lay the key
        To her pale mystery.

IV

"Years back, within this pocket-hole
I found, my Love, a hurried scrawl
Meant not for me," at length said I;
"I glanced thereat, and let it lie:
        The words were three—
        '*Beloved, I agree.*'

V

"Who placed it here; to what request
It gave assent, I never guessed.
Some prayer of some hot heart, no doubt,
To some coy maiden hereabout,
        Just as, maybe,
        With you, Sweet Heart, and me."

VI

She waited, till with quickened breath
She spoke, as one who banisheth
Reserves that lovecraft heeds so well,
To ease some mighty wish to tell:
        "'Twas I," said she,
        "Who wrote thus clinchingly.

VII

"My lover's wife—aye, wife—knew nought
Of what we felt, and bore, and thought. . . .
He'd said: '*I wed with thee or die:*
She stands between, 'tis true. But why?
Do thou agree,
And—she shall cease to be.'

VIII

"How I held back, how love supreme
Involved me madly in his scheme
Why should I say? . . . I wrote assent
(You found it hid) to his intent. . . .
She—*died*. . . . But he
Came not to wed with me.

IX

"O shrink not, Love!—Had these eyes seen
But once thine own, such had not been!
But we were strangers. . . . Thus the plot
Cleared passion's path.—Why came he not
To wed with me? . . .
He wived the gibbet-tree."

X

—Under that oak of heretofore
Sat Sweetheart mine with me no more:
By many a Fiord, and Strom, and Fleuve
Have I since wandered. . . . Soon, for love,
Distraught went she—
'Twas said for love of me.

HER LATE HUSBAND

(KING'S HINTOCK, 182–)

"NO—not where I shall make my own;
But dig his grave just by
The woman's with the initialed stone—
As near as he can lie—
After whose death he seemed to ail,
Though none considered why.

"And when I also claim a nook,
And your feet tread me in,
Bestow me, in my maiden name,
Among my kith and kin,
That strangers gazing may not dream
I did a husband win."

"Widow, your wish shall be obeyed:
Though, thought I, certainly
You'd lay him where your folk are laid,
And your grave, too, will be,
As custom hath it; you to right,
And on the left hand he."

"Aye, sexton; such the Hintock rule,
And none has said it nay;
But now you find a native here
Eschews that ancient way . . .
And it may be, some Christmas night,
When angels walk, they'll say:

"'O strange interment! Civilized lands
Afford few types thereof;
Here is a man who takes his rest
Beside his very Love,
Beside the one who was his wife
In our sight up above!'"

THE SELF-UNSEEING

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!

IN TENEBRIS

I

"Percussus sum sicut foenum, et aruit cor meum."—*Ps.* ci.

Wintertime nighs;
But my bereavement-pain
It cannot bring again:
Twice no one dies.

Flower-petals flee;
But, since it once hath been,
No more that severing scene
Can harrow me.

Birds faint in dread:
I shall not lose old strength
In the lone frost's black length:
Strength long since fled!

Leaves freeze to dun;
But friends can not turn cold
This season as of old
For him with none.

Tempests may scath;
But love can not make smart
Again this year his heart
Who no heart hath.

Black is night's cope;
But death will not appal
One who, past doubtings all,
Waits in unhope.

IN TENEBRIS

II

"Considerabam ad dexteram, et videbam; et non erat qui cognosceret me. . . . Non est qui requirat animam meam."—*Ps.* cxli.

WHEN the clouds' swoln bosoms echo back the shouts of the many and strong
That things are all as they best may be, save a few to be right ere long,
And my eyes have not the vision in them to discern what to these is so clear,
The blot seems straightway in me alone; one better he were not here.

The stout upstanders say, All's well with us: ruers have nought to rue!
And what the potent say so oft, can it fail to be somewhat true?
Breezily go they, breezily come; their dust smokes around their career,
Till I think I am one born out of due time, who has no calling here.

Their dawns bring lusty joys, it seems; their eves exultance sweet;
Our times are blessed times, they cry: Life shapes it as is most meet,
And nothing is much the matter; there are many smiles to a tear;
Then what is the matter is I, I say. Why should such an one be here? . . .

Let him to whose ears the low-voiced Best seems stilled by the clash of the First,
Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst,
Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear,
Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry; he disturbs the order here.

1895–96.

IN TENEBRIS

III

"Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! Habitavi cum habitantibus Cedar; multum incola fuit anima mea."—*Ps.* cxix.

THERE have been times when I well might have passed and the ending have come—
Points in my path when the dark might have stolen on me, artless, unrueing—
Ere I had learnt that the world was a welter of futile doing:
Such had been times when I well might have passed, and the ending have come!

Say, on the noon when the half-sunny hours told that April was nigh,
And I upgathered and cast forth the snow from the crocus-border,
Fashioned and furbished the soil into a summer-seeming order,
Glowing in gladsome faith that I quickened the year thereby.

Or on that loneliest of eves when afar and benighted we stood,
She who upheld me and I, in the midmost of Egdon together,
Confident I in her watching and ward through the blackening heather,
Deeming her matchless in might and with measureless scope endued.

Or on that winter-wild night when, reclined by the chimney-nook quoin,
Slowly a drowse overgat me, the smallest and feeblest of folk there,
Weak from my baptism of pain; when at times and anon I awoke there—
Heard of a world wheeling on, with no listing or longing to join.

Even then! while unweeting that vision could vex or that knowledge could numb,
That sweets to the mouth in the belly are bitter, and tart, and untoward,
Then, on some dim-coloured scene should my briefly raised curtain have lowered,
Then might the Voice that is law have said "Cease!" and the ending have come.

1896.

THE CHURCH-BUILDER

I

THE church flings forth a battled shade
Over the moon-blanched sward;
The church; my gift; whereto I paid
My all in hand and hoard;
Lavished my gains
With stintless pains
To glorify the Lord.

II

I squared the broad foundations in
Of ashlared masonry;
I moulded mullions thick and thin,
Hewed fillet and ogee:
I circleted
Each sculptured head
With nimb and canopy.

III

I called in many a craftsmaster
To fix emblazoned glass,
To figure Cross and Sepulchre
On dossal, boss, and brass.
My gold all spent,
My jewels went
To gem the cups of Mass.

IV

I borrowed deep to carve the screen
And raise the ivoried Rood;
I parted with my small demesne
To make my owings good.
Heir-looms unpriced
I sacrificed,
Until debt-free I stood.

V

So closed the task. "Deathless the Creed
Here substanced!" said my soul:
"I heard me bidden to this deed,
And straight obeyed the call.
Illume this fane,
That not in vain
I build it, Lord of all!"

VI

But, as it chanced me, then and there
Did dire misfortunes burst;
My home went waste for lack of care,
My sons rebelled and curst;
Till I confessed
That aims the best
Were looking like the worst.

VII

Enkindled by my votive work
No burning faith I find;
The deeper thinkers sneer and smirk,
And give my toil no mind;
From nod and wink
I read they think
That I am fool and blind.

VIII

My gift to God seems futile, quite;
The world moves as erstwhile;
And powerful Wrong on feeble Right
Tramples in olden style.
My faith burns down,
I see no crown;
But Cares, and Griefs, and Guile.

IX

So now, the remedy? Yea, this:
I gently swing the door
Here, of my fane—no soul to wis—
And cross the patterned floor
To the rood-screen
That stands between
The nave and inner chore.

X

The rich red windows dim the moon,
But little light need I;
I mount the prie-dieu, lately hewn
From woods of rarest dye;
Then from below
My garment, so,
I draw this cord, and tie

XI

One end thereof around the beam
Midway 'twixt Cross and truss:
I noose the nethermost extreme,
And in ten seconds thus
I journey hence—
To that land whence
No rumour reaches us.

XII

Well: Here at morn they'll light on one
Dangling in mockery
Of what he spent his substance on
Blindly and uselessly! . . .
"He might," they'll say,
"Have built, some way,
A cheaper gallows-tree!"

THE LOST PYX

A MEDIÆVAL LEGEND[1]

SOME say the spot is banned: that the pillar Cross-and-Hand
Attests to a deed of hell;
But of else than of bale is the mystic tale
That ancient Vale-folk tell,

[1] On a lonely table-land above the Vale of Blackmore, between High-Stoy and Bubb-Down hills, and commanding in clear weather views that extend from the English to the Bristol Channel, stands a pillar, apparently mediæval, called Cross-and-Hand, or Christ-in-Hand. One tradition of its origin is mentioned in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; another, more detailed, preserves the story here given.

Ere Cernel's Abbey ceased hereabout there dwelt a priest,
(In later life sub-prior
Of the brotherhood there, whose bones are now bare
In the field that was Cernel choir).

One night in his cell at the foot of yon dell
The priest heard a frequent cry:
"Go, father, in haste to the cot on the waste,
And shrive a man waiting to die."

Said the priest in a shout to the caller without,
"The night howls, the tree-trunks bow;
One may barely by day track so rugged a way,
And can I then do so now?"

No further word from the dark was heard,
And the priest moved never a limb;
And he slept and dreamed; till a Visage seemed
To frown from Heaven at him.

In a sweat he arose; and the storm shrieked shrill,
And smote as in savage joy;
While High-Stoy trees twanged to Bubb-Down Hill,
And Bubb-Down to High-Stoy.

There seemed not a holy thing in hail,
Nor shape of light or love,
From the Abbey north of Blackmore Vale
To the Abbey south thereof.

Yet he plodded thence through the dark immense,
And with many a stumbling stride
Through copse and briar climbed nigh and nigher
To the cot and the sick man's side.

When he would have unslung the Vessels uphung
To his arm in the steep ascent,
He made loud moan: the Pyx was gone
Of the Blessed Sacrament.

Then in dolorous dread he beat his head:
"No earthly prize or pelf
Is the thing I've lost in tempest tossed,
But the Body of Christ Himself!"

He thought of the Visage his dream revealed,
And turned towards whence he came,
Hands groping the ground along foot-track and field,
And head in a heat of shame.

Till here on the hill, betwixt vill and vill,
He noted a clear straight ray
Stretching down from the sky to a spot hard by,
Which shone with the light of day.

And gathered around the illumined ground
Were common beasts and rare,
All kneeling at gaze, and in pause profound
Attent on an object there.

'Twas the Pyx, unharmed 'mid the circling rows
Of Blackmore's hairy throng,
Whereof were oxen, sheep, and does,
And hares from the brakes among;

And badgers grey, and conies keen,
And squirrels of the tree,
And many a member seldom seen
Of Nature's family.

The ireful winds that scoured and swept
Through coppice, clump, and dell,
Within that holy circle slept
Calm as in hermit's cell.

Then the priest bent likewise to the sod
And thanked the Lord of Love,
And Blessed Mary, Mother of God,
And all the saints above.

And turning straight with his priceless freight,
He reached the dying one,
Whose passing sprite had been stayed for the rite
Without which bliss hath none.

And when by grace the priest won place,
And served the Abbey well,
He reared this stone to mark where shone
That midnight miracle.

TESS'S LAMENT

I

I WOULD that folk forgot me quite,
Forgot me quite!
I would that I could shrink from sight,
And no more see the sun.
Would it were time to say farewell,
To claim my nook, to need my knell,
Time for them all to stand and tell
Of my day's work as done.

II

Ah! dairy where I lived so long,
I lived so long;
Where I would rise up staunch and strong,
And lie down hopefully.
'Twas there within the chimney-seat
He watched me to the clock's slow beat—
Loved me, and learnt to call me Sweet,
And whispered words to me.

III

And now he's gone; and now he's gone;
And now he's gone!
The flowers we potted perhaps are thrown
To rot upon the farm.
And where we had our supper-fire
May now grow nettle, dock, and briar,
And all the place be mould and mire
So cozy once and warm.

IV

And it was I who did it all,
Who did it all;
'Twas I who made the blow to fall
On him who thought no guile.
Well, it is finished—past, and he
Has left me to my misery,
And I must take my Cross on me
For wronging him awhile.

V

How gay we looked that day we wed,
That day we wed!
"May joy be with ye!" they all said
A-standing by the durn.
I wonder what they say o'us now,
And if they know my lot; and how
She feels who milks my favourite cow,
And takes my place at churn!

VI

It wears me out to think of it,
To think of it;
I cannot bear my fate as writ,
I'd have my life unbe;
Would turn my memory to a blot,
Make every relic of me rot,
My doings be as they were not,
And gone all trace of me!

THE SUPPLANTER

A TALE

I

HE bends his travel-tarnished feet
To where she wastes in clay:
From day-dawn until eve he fares
Along the wintry way;
From day-dawn until eve repairs
Towards her mound to pray.

II

"Are these the gravestone shapes that meet
My forward-straining view?
Or forms that cross a window-blind
In circle, knot, and queue:
Gay forms, that cross and whirl and wind
To music throbbing through?"—

III

"The Keeper of the Field of Tombs
Dwells by its gateway-pier;
He celebrates with feast and dance
His daughter's twentieth year:
He celebrates with wine of France
The birthday of his dear."—

IV

"The gates are shut when evening glooms:
Lay down your wreath, sad wight;
To-morrow is a time more fit
For placing flowers aright:
The morning is the time for it;
Come, wake with us to-night!"—

V

He drops his wreath, and enters in,
And sits, and shares their cheer.—
"I fain would foot with you, young man,
Before all others here;
I fain would foot it for a span
With such a cavalier!"

VI

She coaxes, clasps, nor fails to win
His first-unwilling hand:
The merry music strikes its staves,
The dancers quickly band;
And with the Damsel of the Graves
He duly takes his stand.

VII

"You dance divinely, stranger swain,
Such grace I've never known.
O longer stay! Breathe not adieu
And leave me here alone!
O longer stay: to her be true
Whose heart is all your own!"—

VIII

"I mark a phantom through the pane,
That beckons in despair,
Its mouth all drawn with heavy moan—
Her to whom once I sware!"—
"Nay; 'tis the lately carven stone
Of some strange girl laid there!"—

IX

"I see white flowers upon the floor
Betrodden to a clot;
My wreath were they?"—"Nay; love me much,
Swear you'll forget me not!
'Twas but a wreath! Full many such
Are brought here and forgot."

. . . . .

X

The watches of the night grow hoar,
He wakens ere the sun;
"Now could I kill thee here!" he says,
"For winning me from one
Who ever in her living days
Was pure as cloistered nun!"

XI

She cowers; and, rising, roves he then
Afar for many a mile,
For evermore to be apart
From her who could beguile
His senses by her burning heart,
And win his love awhile.

XII

A year beholds him wend again
To her who wastes in clay;
From day-dawn until eve he fares
Along the wintry way,
From day-dawn until eve repairs
Towards her mound to pray.

XIII

And there he sets him to fulfil
        His frustrate first intent :
And lay upon her bed, at last,
        The offering earlier meant :
When, on his stooping figure, ghast
        And haggard eyes are bent.

XIV

"O surely for a little while
        You can be kind to me .
For do you love her, do you hate,
        She knows not—cares not she :
Only the living feel the weight
        Of loveless misery !

XV

"I own my sin ; I've paid its cost,
        Being outcast, shamed, and bare :
I give you daily my whole heart,
        Your babe my tender care,
I pour you prayers ; and aye to part
        Is more than I can bear !"

XVI

He turns—unpitying, passion-tossed ,
        "I know you not !" he cries,
"Nor know your child. I knew this maid,
        But she's in Paradise !"
And swiftly in the winter shade
        He breaks from her and flies.

IMITATIONS, ETC.

SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

'Thou shalt be—Nothing."—OMAR KHAYYÁM.
'Tombless, with no remembrance."—W. SHAKESPEARE.

DEAD shalt thou lie; and nought
Be told of thee or thought,
For thou hast plucked not of the Muses' tree:
And even in Hades' halls
Amidst thy fellow-thralls
No friendly shade thy shade shall company!

CATULLUS: XXXI

(After passing Sirmione, April 1887)

SIRMIO, thou dearest dear of strands
That Neptune strokes in lake and sea,
With what high joy from stranger lands
Doth thy old friend set foot on thee!
Yea, barely seems it true to me
That no Bithynia holds me now,
But calmly and assuringly
Around me stretchest homely Thou.

Is there a scene more sweet than when
Our clinging cares are undercast,
And, worn by alien moils and men,
The long untrodden sill repassed,
We press the pined for couch at last,
And find a full repayment there?
Then hail, sweet Sirmio; thou that wast,
And art, mine own unrivalled Fair!

AFTER SCHILLER

KNIGHT, a true sister-love
 This heart retains ;
Ask me no other love,
 That way lie pains !

Calm must I view thee come,
 Calm see thee go ;
Tale-telling tears of thine
 I must not know !

SONG FROM HEINE

I SCANNED her picture dreaming,
 Till each dear line and hue
Was imaged, to my seeming,
 As if it lived anew.

Her lips began to borrow
 Their former wondrous smile ;
Her fair eyes, faint with sorrow,
 Grew sparkling as erstwhile.

Such tears as often ran not
 Ran then, my love, for thee ;
And O, believe I cannot
 That thou art lost to me !

FROM VICTOR HUGO

CHILD, were I king, I'd yield my royal rule,
 My chariot, sceptre, vassal-service due,
My crown, my porphyry-basined waters cool,
My fleets, whereto the sea is but a pool,
 For a glance from you !

Love, were I God, the earth and its heaving airs,
 Angels, the demons abject under me,
Vast chaos with its teeming womby lairs,
Time, space, all would I give—aye, upper spheres,
 For a kiss from thee!

CARDINAL BEMBO'S EPITAPH ON RAPHAEL

HERE'S one in whom Nature feared—faint at such vying—
Eclipse while he lived, and decease at his dying.

RETROSPECT

"I HAVE LIVED WITH SHADES"

I

I HAVE lived with Shades so long,
And talked to them so oft,
Since forth from cot and croft
I went mankind among,
That sometimes they
In their dim style
Will pause awhile
To hear my say;

II

And take me by the hand,
And lead me through their rooms
In the To-be, where Dooms
Half-wove and shapeless stand:
And show from there
The dwindled dust
And rot and rust
Of things that were.

III

"Now turn," spake they to me
One day: "Look whence we came,
And signify his name
Who gazes thence at thee."—
—"Nor name nor race
Know I, or can,"
I said, "Of man
So commonplace.

IV

"He moves me not at all;
I note no ray or jot
Of rareness in his lot,
Or star exceptional.
Into the dim
Dead throngs around
He'll sink, nor sound
Be left of him."

V

"Yet," said they, "his frail speech,
Hath accents pitched like thine—
Thy mould and his define
A likeness each to each—
But go! Deep pain
Alas, would be
His name to thee,
And told in vain!"

February 2, 1899.

MEMORY AND I

"O MEMORY, where is now my youth,
Who used to say that life was truth?"

"I saw him in a crumbled cot
Beneath a tottering tree;
That he as phantom lingers there
Is only known to me."

"O Memory, where is now my joy,
Who lived with me in sweet employ?"

"I saw him in gaunt gardens lone,
Where laughter used to be;
That he as phantom wanders there
Is known to none but me."

"O Memory, where is now my hope,
Who charged with deeds my skill and scope?"

"I saw her in a tomb of tomes,
  Where dreams are wont to be;
That she as spectre haunteth there
  Is only known to me."

"O Memory, where is now my faith,
One time a champion, now a wraith?"

"I saw her in a ravaged aisle,
  Bowed down on bended knee;
That her poor ghost outflickers there
  Is known to none but me."

"O Memory, where is now my love,
That rayed me as a god above?"

"I saw her in an ageing shape
  Where beauty used to be;
That her fond phantom lingers there
  Is only known to me."

'ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩι ΘΕΩι.

LONG have I framed weak phantasies of Thee,
    O Willer masked and dumb!
    Who makest Life become,—
As though by labouring all-unknowingly,
    Like one whom reveries numb.

How much of consciousness informs Thy will,
    Thy biddings, as if blind,
    Of death-inducing kind,
Nought shows to us ephemeral ones who fill
    But moments in Thy mind.

Perhaps Thy ancient rote-restricted ways
Thy ripening rule transcends;
That listless effort tends
To grow percipient with advance of days,
And with percipience mends.

For, in unwonted purlieus, far and nigh,
At whiles or short or long,
May be discerned a wrong
Dying as of self-slaughter; whereat I
Would raise my voice in song.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

PREFACE

In collecting the following poems I have to thank the editors and proprietors of the periodicals in which certain of them have appeared for permission to reclaim them.

Now that the miscellany is brought together, some lack of concord in pieces written at widely severed dates, and in contrasting moods and circumstances, will be obvious enough. This I cannot help, but the sense of disconnection, particularly in respect of those lyrics penned in the first person, will be immaterial when it is borne in mind that they are to be regarded, in the main, as dramatic monologues by different characters.

As a whole they will, I hope, take the reader forward, even if not far, rather than backward. I should add that some lines in the early-dated poems have been rewritten, though they have been left substantially unchanged.

T. H.

September 1909.

THE REVISITATION

As I lay awake at night-time
In an ancient country barrack known to ancient cannoneers,
And recalled the hopes that heralded each seeming brave and bright time
Of my primal purple years,

Much it haunted me that, nigh there,
I had borne my bitterest loss—when One who went, came not again;
In a joyless hour of discord, in a joyless-hued July there—
A July just such as then.

And as thus I brooded longer,
With my faint eyes on the feeble square of wan-lit window frame,
A quick conviction sprung within me, grew, and grew yet stronger,
That the month-night was the same,

Too, as that which saw her leave me
On the rugged ridge of Waterstone, the peewits plaining round;
And a lapsing twenty years had ruled that—as it were to grieve me—
I should near the once-loved ground.

Though but now a war-worn stranger
Chance had quartered here, I rose up and descended to the yard.
All was soundless, save the troopers' horses tossing at the manger,
And the sentry keeping guard.

Through the gateway I betook me
Down the High Street and beyond the lamps, across the battered bridge,
Till the country darkness clasped me and the friendly shine forsook me,
And I bore towards the Ridge,

With a dim unowned emotion
Saying softly: "Small my reason, now at midnight, to be here . . . .
Yet a sleepless swain of fifty with a brief romantic notion
May retrace a track so dear."

Thus I walked with thoughts half-uttered
Up the lane I knew so well, the grey, gaunt, lonely Lane of Slyre;
And at whiles behind me, far at sea, a sullen thunder muttered
As I mounted high and higher.

Till, the upper roadway quitting,
I adventured on the open drouthy downland thinly grassed,
While the spry white scuts of conies flashed before me, earthward flitting,
And an arid wind went past.

Round about me bulged the barrows
As before, in antique silence—immemorial funeral piles—
Where the sleek herds trampled daily the remains of flint-tipt arrows
Mid the thyme and chamomiles;

And the Sarsen stone there, dateless,
On whose breast we had sat and told the zephyrs many a tender vow,
Held the heat of yester sun, as sank thereon one fated mateless
From those far fond hours till now.

Maybe flustered by my presence
Rose the peewits, just as all those years back, wailing soft and loud,
And revealing their pale pinions like a fitful phosphorescence
Up against the cope of cloud,

Where their dolesome exclamations
Seemed the voicings of the self-same throats I had heard when life was green,
Though since that day uncounted frail forgotten generations
Of their kind had flecked the scene.—

And so, living long and longer
In a past that lived no more, my eyes discerned there, suddenly,
That a figure broke the skyline—first in vague contour, then stronger,
And was crossing near to me.

Some long-missed familiar gesture,
Something wonted, struck me in the figure's pause to list and heed,
Till I fancied from its handling of its loosely wrapping vesture
That it might be She indeed.

'Twas not reasonless: below there
In the vale, had been her home; the nook might hold her even yet,
And the downlands were her father's fief; she still might come and go there;—
So I rose, and said, "Agnette!"

With a little leap, half-frightened,
She withdrew some steps; then letting intuition smother fear
In a place so long-accustomed, and as one whom thought enlightened,
She replied: "What—*that* voice?—here!"

"Yes, Agnette!—And did the occasion
Of our marching hither make you think I *might* walk where we two—"
"O, I often come," she murmured with a moment's coy evasion,
"('Tis not far),—and—think of you."

Then I took her hand, and led her
To the ancient people's stone whereon I had sat. There now sat we;
And together talked, until the first reluctant shyness fled her,
And she spoke confidingly.

"It is *just* as ere we parted!"
Said she, brimming high with joy.—"And when, then, came you here, and why?"
"—Dear, I could not sleep for thinking of our trystings when twin-hearted."
She responded, "Nor could I.

"There are few things I would rather
Than be wandering at this spirit-hour—lone-lived, my kindred dead—
On this wold of well-known feature I inherit from my father:
Night or day, I have no dread . . . .

"O I wonder, wonder whether
Any heartstring bore a signal-thrill between us twain or no?—
Some such influence can, at times, they say, draw severed souls together."
I said, "Dear, we'll dream it so."

Each one's hand the other's grasping,
And a mutual forgiveness won, we sank to silent thought,
A large content in us that seemed our rended lives reclasping,
And contracting years to nought.

Till I, maybe overweary
From the lateness, and a wayfaring so full of strain and stress
For one no longer buoyant, to a peak so steep and eery,
Sank to slow unconsciousness . . . .

How long I slept I knew not,
But the brief warm summer night had slid when, to my swift surprise,
A red upedging sun, of glory chambered mortals view not,
Was blazing on my eyes,

From the Milton Woods to Dole-Hill
All the spacious landscape lighting, and around about my feet
Flinging tall thin tapering shadows from the meanest mound and mole-hill,
And on trails the ewes had beat.

She was sitting still beside me,
Dozing likewise; and I turned to her, to take her hanging hand;
When, the more regarding, that which like a spectre shook and tried me
In her image then I scanned;

That which Time's transforming chisel
Had been tooling night and day for twenty years, and tooled too well,
In its rendering of crease where curve was, where was raven, grizzle—
Pits, where peonies once did dwell.

She had wakened, and perceiving
(I surmise) my sigh and shock, my quite involuntary dismay,
Up she started, and—her wasted figure all throughout it heaving—
Said, "Ah, yes: I am *thus* by day!

"Can you really wince and wonder
That the sunlight should reveal you such a thing of skin and bone,
As if unaware a Death's-head must of need lie not far under
Flesh whose years out-count your own?

"Yes: that movement was a warning
Of the worth of man's devotion!—Yes, Sir, I am *old*," said she,
"And the thing which should increase love turns it quickly into scorning—
And your new-won heart from me!"

Then she went, ere I could call her,
With the too proud temper ruling that had parted us before,
And I saw her form descend the slopes, and smaller grow and smaller,
Till I caught its course no more . . . .

True; I might have dogged her downward;
—But it *may* be (though I know not) that this trick on us of Time
Disconcerted and confused me.—Soon I bent my footsteps townward,
Like to one who had watched a crime.

Well I knew my native weakness,
Well I know it still. I cherished her reproach like physic-wine,
For I saw in that emaciate shape of bitterness and bleakness
A nobler soul than mine.

Did I not return, then, ever?—
Did we meet again?—mend all?—Alas, what greyhead perseveres!—
Soon I got the Route elsewhither.—Since that hour I have seen her never:
Love is lame at fifty years.

A TRAMPWOMAN'S TRAGEDY

(182–)

I

FROM Wynyard's Gap the livelong day,
The livelong day,
We beat afoot the northward way
We had travelled times before.
The sun-blaze burning on our backs,
Our shoulders sticking to our packs,
By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks
We skirted sad Sedge-Moor.

II

Full twenty miles we jaunted on,
We jaunted on,—
My fancy-man, and jeering John,
And Mother Lee, and I.
And, as the sun drew down to west,
We climbed the toilsome Poldon crest,
And saw, of landskip sights the best,
The inn that beamed thereby.

III

For months we had padded side by side,
Ay, side by side
Through the Great Forest, Blackmoor wide,
And where the Parret ran.
We'd faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,
Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge,
Been stung by every Marshwood midge,
I and my fancy-man.

IV

Lone inns we loved, my man and I,
My man and I;
"King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,
"The Horse" on Hintock Green,

The cosy house at Wynyard's Gap,
"The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,
And many another wayside tap
Where folk might sit unseen.

V

Now as we trudged—O deadly day,
O deadly day!—
I teased my fancy-man in play
And wanton idleness.
I walked alongside jeering John,
I laid his hand my waist upon;
I would not bend my glances on
My lover's dark distress.

VI

Thus Poldon top at last we won,
At last we won,
And gained the inn at sink of sun
Far-famed as "Marshal's Elm."
Beneath us figured tor and lea,
From Mendip to the western sea—
I doubt if finer sight there be
Within this royal realm.

VII

Inside the settle all a-row—
All four a-row
We sat, I next to John, to show
That he had wooed and won.
And then he took me on his knee,
And swore it was his turn to be
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee
Passed to my former one.

VIII

Then in a voice I had never heard,
I had never heard,
My only Love to me: "One word,
My lady, if you please!

Whose is the child you are like to bear?—
His? After all my months o' care?"
God knows 'twas not! But, O despair!
I nodded—still to tease.

IX

Then up he sprung, and with his knife—
And with his knife
He let out jeering Johnny's life,
Yes; there, at set of sun.
The slant ray through the window nigh
Gilded John's blood and glazing eye,
Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I
Knew that the deed was done.

X

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,
The gloomy tale,
How that at Ivel-chester jail
My Love, my sweetheart swung;
Though stained till now by no misdeed
Save one horse ta'en in time o' need;
(Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed
Ere his last fling he flung.)

XI

Thereaft I walked the world alone,
Alone, alone!
On his death-day I gave my groan
And dropt his dead-born child.
'Twas nigh the jail, beneath a tree,
None tending me; for Mother Lee
Had died at Glaston, leaving me
Unfriended on the wild.

XII

And in the night as I lay weak,
As I lay weak,
The leaves a-falling on my cheek,
The red moon low declined—

The ghost of him I'd die to kiss
Rose up and said: "Ah, tell me this!
Was the child mine, or was it his?
    Speak, that I rest may find!"

XIII

O doubt not but I told him then,
    I told him then,
That I had kept me from all men
    Since we joined lips and swore.
Whereat he smiled, and thinned away
As the wind stirred to call up day . . .
—'Tis past! And here alone I stray
    Haunting the Western Moor.

NOTES.—"Windwhistle" (Stanza IV.) The highness and dryness of Windwhistle Inn was impressed upon the writer two or three years ago, when, after climbing on a hot afternoon to the beautiful spot near which it stands and entering the inn for tea, he was informed by the landlady that none could be had, unless he would fetch water from a valley half a mile off, the house containing not a drop, owing to its situation. However, a tantalizing row of full barrels behind her back testified to a wetness of a certain sort, which was not at that time desired.

"Marshal's Elm" (Stanza VI.), so picturesquely situated, is no longer an inn, though the house, or part of it, still remains. It used to exhibit a fine old swinging sign.

"Blue Jimmy" (Stanza X.) was a notorious horse-stealer of Wessex in those days, who appropriated more than a hundred horses before he was caught, among others one belonging to a neighbour of the writer's grandfather. He was hanged at the now demolished Ivel-chester or Ilchester jail above mentioned—that building formerly of so many sinister associations in the minds of the local peasantry, and the continual haunt of fever, which at last led to its condemnation. Its site is now an innocent-looking green meadow.

April 1902.

THE TWO ROSALINDS

I

THE dubious daylight ended,
And I walked the Town alone, unminding whither bound and why,
As from each gaunt street and gaping square a mist of light ascended
    And dispersed upon the sky.

II

Files of evanescent faces
Passed each other without heeding, in their travail, teen, or joy,
Some in void unvisioned listlessness inwrought with pallid traces
Of keen penury's annoy.

III

Nebulous flames in crystal cages
Leered as if with discontent at city movement, murk, and grime,
And as waiting some procession of great ghosts from bygone ages
To exalt the ignoble time.

IV

In a colonnade high-lighted,
By a thoroughfare where stern utilitarian traffic dinned,
On a red and white emblazonment of players and parts, I sighted
The name of "Rosalind,"

V

And her famous mates of "Arden,"
Who observed no stricter customs than "the seasons' difference" bade,
Who lived with running brooks for books in Nature's wildwood garden,
And called idleness their trade . . . .

VI

Now the poster stirred an ember
Still remaining from my ardours of some forty years before,
When the self-same portal on an eve it thrilled me to remember
A like announcement bore ;

VII

And expectantly I had entered,
And had first beheld in human mould a Rosalind woo and plead,
On whose transcendent figuring my speedy soul had centred
As it had been she indeed . . . .

VIII

So ; all other plans discarding,
I resolved on entrance, bent on seeing what I once had seen,

And approached the gangway of my earlier knowledge, disregarding
The tract of time between.

IX

"The words, sir?" cried a creature
Hovering mid the shine and shade as 'twixt the live world and the tomb;
But the well-known numbers needed not for me a text or teacher
To revive and re-illume.

X

Then the play. . . . But how unfitted
Was *this* Rosalind!—a mammet quite to me, in memories nurst,
And with chilling disappointment soon I sought the street I had quitted,
To re-ponder on the first.

XI

The hag still hawked,—I met her
Just without the colonnade. "So you don't like her, sir?" said she.
"Ah—*I* was once that Rosalind!—I acted her—none better—
Yes—in eighteen sixty-three.

XII

"Thus I won Orlando to me
In my then triumphant days when I had charm and maidenhood,
Now some forty years ago.—I used to say, *Come woo me, woo me!*"
And she struck the attitude.

XIII

It was when I had gone there nightly;
And the voice—through raucous now—was yet the old one.—Clear as noon
My Rosalind was here . . . . Thereon the band withinside lightly
Beat up a merry tune.

A SUNDAY MORNING TRAGEDY

(*circa* 186–)

I BORE a daughter flower-fair,
In Pydel Vale, alas for me;
I joyed to mother one so rare,
But dead and gone I now would be.

Men looked and loved her as she grew,
And she was won, alas for me;
She told me nothing, but I knew,
And saw that sorrow was to be.

I knew that one had made her thrall,
A thrall to him, alas for me;
And then, at last, she told me all,
And wondered what her end would be.

She owned that she had loved too well,
Had loved too well, unhappy she,
And bore a secret time would tell,
Though in her shroud she'd sooner be.

I plodded to her sweetheart's door
In Pydel Vale, alas for me:
I pleaded with him, pleaded sore,
To save her from her misery.

He frowned, and swore he could not wed,
Seven times he swore it could not be;
"Poverty's worse than shame," he said,
Till all my hope went out of me.

"I've packed my traps to sail the main"—
Roughly he spake, alas did he—
"Wessex beholds me not again,
'Tis worse than any jail would be!"

—There was a shepherd whom I knew,
A subtle man, alas for me:

I sought him all the pastures through,
Though better I had ceased to be.

I traced him by his lantern light,
And gave him hint, alas for me,
Of how she found her in the plight
That is so scorned in Christendie.

"Is there an herb. . . . ?" I asked. "Or none?"
Yes, thus I asked him desperately.
"—There is," he said; "a certain one. . . ."
Would he had sworn that none knew he!

"To-morrow I will walk your way,"
He hinted low, alas for me.—
Fieldwards I gazed throughout next day;
Now fields I never more would see!

The sunset-shine, as curfew strook,
As curfew strook beyond the lea,
Lit his white smock and gleaming crook,
While slowly he drew near to me.

He pulled from underneath his smock
The herb I sought, my curse to be—
"At times I use it in my flock,"
He said, and hope waxed strong in me.

"'Tis meant to balk ill-motherings"—
(Ill-motherings! Why should they be?)—
"If not, would God have sent such things?"
So spoke the shepherd unto me.

That night I watched the poppling brew,
With bended back and hand on knee:
I stirred it till the dawnlight grew,
And the wind whiffled wailfully.

"This scandal shall be slain," said I,
"That lours upon her innocency:
I'll give all whispering tongues the lie;"—
But worse than whispers was to be.

"Here's physic for untimely fruit,"
I said to her, alas for me,
Early that morn in fond salute;
And in my grave I now would be.

—Next Sunday came, with sweet church chimes
In Pydel Vale, alas for me:
I went into her room betimes;
No more may such a Sunday be!

"Mother, instead of rescue nigh,"
She faintly breathed, alas for me,
"I feel as I were like to die,
And underground soon, soon should be."

From church that noon the people walked
In twos and threes, alas for me,
Showed their new raiment—smiled and talked,
Though sackcloth-clad I longed to be.

Came to my door her lover's friends,
And cheerly cried, alas for me,
"Right glad are we he makes amends,
For never a sweeter bride can be."

My mouth dried, as 'twere scorched within,
Dried at their words, alas for me:
More and more neighbours crowded in,
(O why should mothers ever be!)

"Ha-ha! Such well-kept news!" laughed they,
Yes—so they laughed, alas for me.
"Whose banns were called in church to-day?"—
Christ, how I wished my soul could flee!

"Where is she? O the stealthy miss,"
Still bantered they, alas for me,
"To keep a wedding close as this . . . ."
Ay, Fortune worked thus wantonly!

"But you are pale—you did not know?"
They archly asked, alas for me,

I stammered, "Yes—some days—ago,"
While coffined clay I wished to be.

"'Twas done to please her, we surmise?"
(They spoke quite lightly in their glee)
"Done by him as a fond surprise?"
I thought their words would madden me.

Her lover entered. "Where's my bird?—
My bird—my flower—my picotee?
First time of asking, soon the third!"
Ah, in my grave I well may be.

To me he whispered: "Since your call—"
So spoke he then, alas for me—
"I've felt for her, and righted all."
—I think of it to agony.

"She's faint to-day—tired—nothing more—"
Thus did I lie, alas for me. . . .
I called her at her chamber door
As one who scarce had strength to be.

No voice replied. I went within—
O women! scourged the worst are we. . . .
I shrieked. The others hastened in
And saw the stroke there dealt on me.

There she lay—silent, breathless, dead,
Stone dead she lay—wronged, sinless she!—
Ghost-white the cheeks once rosy-red:
Death had took her. Death took not me.

I kissed her colding face and hair,
I kissed her corpse—the bride to be!—
My punishment I cannot bear,
But pray God *not* to pity me.

January 1904.

THE HOUSE OF HOSPITALITIES

HERE we broached the Christmas barrel,
Pushed up the charred log-ends;
Here we sang the Christmas carol,
And called in friends.

Time has tired me since we met here
When the folk now dead were young,
Since the viands were outset here
And quaint songs sung.

And the worm has bored the viol
That used to lead the tune,
Rust eaten out the dial
That struck night's noon.

Now no Christmas brings in neighbours,
And the New Year comes unlit;
Where we sang the mole now labours,
And spiders knit.

Yet at midnight if here walking,
When the moon sheets wall and tree,
I see forms of old time talking,
Who smile on me.

BEREFT

IN the black winter morning
No light will be struck near my eyes
While the clock in the stairway is warning
For five, when he used to rise.
Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard—
Would 'twere underground!

When the summer dawns clearly,
And the appletree-tops seem alight,

Who will undraw the curtain and cheerly
Call out that the morning is bright?

When I tarry at market
No form will cross Durnover Lea
In the gathering darkness, to hark at
Grey's Bridge for the pit-pat o' me.

When the supper crock's steaming,
And the time is the time of his tread,
I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming
In a silence as of the dead.
Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard—
Would 'twere underground!

1901.

JOHN AND JANE

I

He sees the world as a boisterous place
Where all things bear a laughing face,
And humorous scenes go hourly on,
Does John.

II

They find the world a pleasant place
Where all is ecstasy and grace,
Where a light has risen that cannot wane,
Do John and Jane.

III

They see as a palace their cottage-place,
Containing a pearl of the human race,
A hero, maybe, hereafter styled,
Do John and Jane with a baby-child.

IV

They rate the world as a gruesome place,
Where fair looks fade to a skull's grimace,—
As a pilgrimage they would fain get done—
Do John and Jane with their worthless son.

THE CURATE'S KINDNESS

A WORKHOUSE IRONY

I

I THOUGHT they'd be strangers aroun' me,
But she's to be there!
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

II

I thought: "Well, I've come to the Union—
The workhouse at last—
After honest hard work all the week, and Communion
O' Zundays, these fifty years past.

III

"'Tis hard; but," I thought, "never mind it:
There's gain in the end:
And when I get used to the place I shall find it
A home, and may find there a friend.

IV

"Life there will be better than t'other,
For peace is assured.
The men in one wing and their wives in another
Is strictly the rule of the Board."

V

Just then one young Pa'son arriving
Steps up out of breath
To the side o' the waggon wherein we were driving
To Union; and calls out and saith:

VI

"Old folks, that harsh order is altered,
Be not sick of heart!
The Guardians they poohed and they pished and they paltered
When urged not to keep you apart.

VII

"'It is wrong,' I maintained, 'to divide them,
Near forty years wed.'
'Very well, sir. We promise, then, they shall abide them
In one wing together,' they said."

VIII

Then I sank—knew 'twas quite a foredone thing
That misery should be
To the end! . . . To get freed of her there was the one thing
Had made the change welcome to me.

IX

To go there was ending but badly;
'Twas shame and 'twas pain;
"But anyhow," thought I, "thereby I shall gladly
Get free of this forty years' chain."

X

I thought they'd be strangers aroun' me,
But she's to be there!
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

THE FLIRT'S TRAGEDY

(17—)

HERE alone by the logs in my chamber,
Deserted, decrepit—
Spent flames limning ghosts on the wainscot
Of friends I once knew—

My drama and hers begins weirdly
Its dumb re-enactment,
Each scene, sigh, and circumstance passing
In spectral review.

—Wealth was mine beyond wish when I met her—
The pride of the lowland—
Embowered in Tintinhull Valley
By laurel and yew;

And love lit my soul, notwithstanding
My features' ill favour,
Too obvious beside her perfections
Of line and of hue.

But it pleased her to play on my passion,
And whet me to pleadings
That won from her mirthful negations
And scornings undue.

Then I fled her disdains and derisions
To cities of pleasure,
And made me the crony of idlers
In every purlieu,

Of those who lent ear to my story,
A needy Adonis
Gave hint how to grizzle her garden
From roses to rue,

Could his price but be paid for so purging
My scorner of scornings:
Thus tempted, the lust to avenge me
Germed inly and grew.

I clothed him in sumptuous apparel,
Consigned to him coursers,
Meet equipage, liveried attendants
In full retinue.

So dowered, with letters of credit
He wayfared to England,
And spied out the manor she goddessed,
And handy thereto,

Set to hire him a tenantless mansion
As coign-stone of vantage
For testing what gross adulation
Of beauty could do.

He laboured through mornings and evens,
On new moons and sabbaths,
By wiles to enmesh her attention
In park, path, and pew;

And having afar played upon her,
Advanced his lines nearer,
And boldly outleaping conventions,
Bent briskly to woo.

His gay godlike face, his rare seeming
Anon worked to win her,
And later, at noontides and night-tides
They held rendezvous.

His tarriance full spent, he departed
And met me in Venice,
And lines from her told that my jilter
Was stooping to sue.

Not long could be further concealment,
She pled to him humbly:
"By our love and our sin, O protect me;
I fly unto you!"

A mighty remorse overgat me,
I heard her low anguish,
And there in the gloom of the *calle*
My steel ran him through.

A swift push engulphed his hot carrion
Within the canal there—
That still street of waters dividing
The city in two.

—I wandered awhile all unable
To smother my torment,
My brain racked by yells as from Tophet
Of Satan's whole crew.

A month of unrest brought me hovering
At home in her precincts,
To whose hiding-hole local story
Afforded a clue.

Exposed, and expelled by her people,
    Afar off in London
I found her alone, in a sombre
    And soul-stifling mew.

Still burning to make reparation
    I pleaded to wive her,
And father her child, and thus faintly
    My mischief undo.

She yielded, and spells of calm weather
    Succeeded the tempest;
And one sprung of him stood as scion
    Of my bone and thew. . . .

But Time unveils sorrows and secrets,
    And so it befell now:
By inches the curtain was twitched at,
    And slowly undrew.

As we lay, she and I, in the night-time,
    We heard the boy moaning:
"O misery mine! My false father
    Has murdered my true!"

She gasped: yea, she heard; understood it.
    Next day the child fled us;
And nevermore sighted was even
    A print of his shoe.

Thenceforward she shunned me, and languished;
    Till one day the park-pool
Embraced her fair form, and extinguished
    Her eyes' living blue.

—So; ask not what blast may account for
    This aspect of pallor,
These bones that just prison within them
    Life's poor residue;

But pass by, and leave unregarded
    A Cain to his suffering,
For vengeance too dark on the woman
    Whose lover he slew.

THE REJECTED MEMBER'S WIFE

WE shall see her no more
    On the balcony,
Smiling, while hurt, at the roar
    As of surging sea
From the stormy sturdy band
    Who have doomed her lord's cause,
Though she waves her little hand
    As it were applause.

Here will be candidates yet,
    And candidates' wives,
Fervid with zeal to set
    Their ideals on our lives:
Here will come market-men
    On the market-days,
Here will clash now and then
    More such party assays.

And the balcony will fill
    When such times are renewed,
And the throng in the street will thrill
    With to-day's mettled mood;
But she will no more stand
    In the sunshine there,
With that wave of her white-gloved hand,
    And that chestnut hair.

January 1906.

THE FARM-WOMAN'S WINTER

I

IF seasons all were summers,
  And leaves would never fall,
And hopping casement-comers
  Were foodless not at all,
And fragile folk might be here
  That white winds bid depart;
Then one I used to see here
  Would warm my wasted heart!

II

One frail, who, bravely tilling
Long hours in gripping gusts,
Was mastered by their chilling,
And now his ploughshare rusts.
So savage winter catches
The breath of limber things,
And what I love he snatches,
And what I love not, brings.

AUTUMN IN KING'S HINTOCK PARK

Here by the baring bough
Raking up leaves,
Often I ponder how
Springtime deceives,—
I, an old woman now,
Raking up leaves.

Here in the avenue
Raking up leaves,
Lords' ladies pass in view,
Until one heaves
Sighs at life's russet hue,
Raking up leaves!

Just as my shape you see
Raking up leaves,
I saw, when fresh and free,
Those memory weaves
Into grey ghosts by me,
Raking up leaves.

Yet, Dear, though one may sigh,
Raking up leaves,
New leaves will dance on high—
Earth never grieves!—
Will not, when missed am I
Raking up leaves.

1901.

SHUT OUT THAT MOON

CLOSE up the casement, draw the blind,
Shut out that stealing moon,
She wears too much the guise she wore
Before our lutes were strewn
With years-deep dust, and names we read
On a white stone were hewn.

Step not out on the dew-dashed lawn
To view the Lady's Chair,
Immense Orion's glittering form,
The Less and Greater Bear:
Stay in; to such sights we were drawn
When faded ones were fair.

Brush not the bough for midnight scents
That come forth lingeringly,
And wake the same sweet sentiments
They breathed to you and me
When living seemed a laugh, and love
All it was said to be.

Within the common lamp-lit room
Prison my eyes and thought;
Let dingy details crudely loom,
Mechanic speech be wrought:
Too fragrant was Life's early bloom,
Too tart the fruit it brought!

1904.

REMINISCENCES OF A DANCING MAN

I

WHO now remembers Almack's balls—
Willis's sometime named—
In those two smooth-floored upper halls
For faded ones so famed?
Where as we trod to trilling sound
The fancied phantoms stood around,

Or joined us in the maze,
Of the powdered Dears from Georgian years,
Whose dust lay in sightless sealed-up biers,
The fairest of former days.

II

Who now remembers gay Cremorne,
And all its jaunty jills,
And those wild whirling figures born
Of Jullien's grand quadrilles?
With hats on head and morning coats
There footed to his prancing notes
Our partner-girls and we;
And the gas-jets winked, and the lustres clinked,
And the platform throbbed as with arms enlinked
We moved to the minstrelsy.

III

Who now recalls those crowded rooms
Of old yclept "The Argyle,"
Where to the deep Drum-polka's booms
We hopped in standard style?
Whither have danced those damsels now!
Is Death the partner who doth moue
Their wormy chaps and bare?
Do their spectres spin like sparks within
The smoky halls of the Prince of Sin
To a thunderous Jullien air?

THE DEAD MAN WALKING

THEY hail me as one living,
But don't they know
That I have died of late years,
Untombed although?

I am but a shape that stands here,
A pulseless mould,
A pale past picture, screening
Ashes gone cold.

Not at a minute's warning,
Not in a loud hour,
For me ceased Time's enchantments
In hall and bower.

There was no tragic transit,
No catch of breath,
When silent seasons inched me
On to this death. . . .

—A Troubadour-youth I rambled
With Life for lyre,
The beats of being raging
In me like fire.

But when I practised eyeing
The goal of men,
It iced me, and I perished
A little then.

When passed my friend, my kinsfolk,
Through the Last Door,
And left me standing bleakly,
I died yet more ;

And when my Love's heart kindled
In hate of me,
Wherefore I knew not, died I
One more degree.

And if when I died fully
I cannot say,
And changed into the corpse-thing
I am to-day ;

Yet is it that, though whiling
The time somehow
In walking, talking, smiling,
I live not now.

MORE LOVE LYRICS

1967

In five-score summers! All new eyes,
New minds, new modes, new fools, new wise;
New woes to weep, new joys to prize;

With nothing left of me and you
In that live century's vivid view
Beyond a pinch of dust or two;

A century which, if not sublime,
Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,
A scope above this blinkered time.

—Yet what to me how far above?
For I would only ask thereof
That thy worm should be my worm, Love!

16 Westbourne Park Villas, 1867.

HER DEFINITION

I lingered through the night to break of day,
Nor once did sleep extend a wing to me,
Intently busied with a vast array
Of epithets that should outfigure thee.

Full-featured terms—all fitless—hastened by,
And this sole speech remained: "That maiden mine!"—
Debarred from due description then did I
Perceive the indefinite phrase could yet define.

As common chests encasing wares of price
Are borne with tenderness through halls of state,
For what they cover, so the poor device
Of homely wording I could tolerate,
Knowing its unadornment held as freight
The sweetest image outside Paradise.

W. P. V., Summer: 1866.

THE DIVISION

RAIN on the windows, creaking doors,
With blasts that besom the green,
And I am here, and you are there,
And a hundred miles between!

O were it but the weather, Dear,
O were it but the miles
That summed up all our severance,
There might be room for smiles.

But that thwart thing betwixt us twain,
Which nothing cleaves or clears,
Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,
And longer than the years!

189–.

ON THE DEPARTURE PLATFORM

WE kissed at the barrier; and passing through
She left me, and moment by moment got
Smaller and smaller, until to my view
She was but a spot;

A wee white spot of muslin fluff
That down the diminishing platform bore
Through hustling crowds of gentle and rough
To the carriage door.

Under the lamplight's fitful glowers,
Behind dark groups from far and near,
Whose interests were apart from ours,
She would disappear,

Then show again, till I ceased to see
That flexible form, that nebulous white;
And she who was more than my life to me
Had vanished quite. . . .

We have penned new plans since that fair fond day,
And in season she will appear again—
Perhaps in the same soft white array—
But never as then!

—"And why, young man, must eternally fly
A joy you'll repeat, if you love her well?"
—O friend, nought happens twice thus; why,
I cannot tell!

IN A CATHEDRAL CITY

THESE people have not heard your name;
No loungers in this placid place
Have helped to bruit your beauty's fame.

The grey Cathedral, towards whose face
Bend eyes untold, has met not yours;
Your shade has never swept its base,

Your form has never darked its doors,
Nor have your faultless feet once thrown
A pensive pit-pat on its floors.

Along the street to maids well known
Blithe lovers hum their tender airs,
But in your praise voice not a tone. . . .

—Since nought bespeaks you here, or bears,
As I, your imprint through and through,
Here might I rest, till my heart shares
The spot's unconsciousness of you!

SALISBURY.

"I SAY I'LL SEEK HER"

I SAY, "I'll seek her side
Ere hindrance interposes;"
But eve in midnight closes,
And here I still abide.

When darkness wears I see
Her sad eyes in a vision;
They ask, "What indecision
Detains you, Love, from me?—

"The creaking hinge is oiled,
I have unbarred the backway,
But you tread not the trackway;
And shall the thing be spoiled?

"Far cockcrows echo shrill,
The shadows are abating,
And I am waiting, waiting;
But O, you tarry still!"

HER FATHER

I MET her, as we had privily planned,
Where passing feet beat busily:
She whispered: "Father is at hand!
He wished to walk with me."

His presence as he joined us there
Banished our words of warmth away;
We felt, with cloudings of despair,
What Love must lose that day.

Her crimson lips remained unkissed,
Our fingers kept no tender hold,
His lack of feeling made the tryst
Embarrassed, stiff, and cold.

A cynic ghost then rose and said,
"But is his love for her so small
That, nigh to yours, it may be read
As of no worth at all?

"You love her for her pink and white;
But what when their fresh splendours close?
His love will last her in despite
Of Time, and wrack, and foes."

WEYMOUTH.

AT WAKING

WHEN night was lifting,
And dawn had crept under its shade,
Amid cold clouds drifting
Dead-white as a corpse outlaid,
With a sudden scare
I seemed to behold
My Love in bare
Hard lines unfold.

Yea, in a moment,
An insight that would not die
Killed her old endowment
Of charm that had capped all nigh,
Which vanished to none
Like the gilt of a cloud,
And showed her but one
Of the common crowd.

She seemed but a sample
Of earth's poor average kind,
Lit up by no ample
Enrichments of mien or mind.
I covered my eyes
As to cover the thought,
And unrecognize
What the morn had taught.

O vision appalling
When the one believed-in thing
Is seen falling, falling,
With all to which hope can cling.
Off: it is not true;
For it cannot be
That the prize I drew
Is a blank to me!

WEYMOUTH, 1869.

FOUR FOOTPRINTS

HERE are the tracks upon the sand
Where stood last evening she and I—
Pressed heart to heart and hand to hand;
The morning sun has baked them dry.

I kissed her wet face—wet with rain,
For arid grief had burnt up tears,
While reached us as in sleeping pain
The distant gurgling of the weirs.

"I have married him—yes; feel that ring;
'Tis a week ago that he put it on. . . .
A dutiful daughter does this thing,
And resignation succeeds anon!

"But that I body and soul was yours
Ere he'd possession, he'll never know.
He's a confident man. 'The husband scores,'
He says, 'in the long run' . . . Now, Dear, go!"

I went. And to-day I pass the spot;
It is only a smart the more to endure;
And she whom I held is as though she were not,
For they have resumed their honeymoon tour.

IN THE VAULTED WAY

In the vaulted way, where the passage turned
To the shadowy corner that none could see,
You paused to part from me,—plaintively;
Though overnight had come words that burned
My fond frail happiness out of me.

And then I kissed you,—despite my thought
That our spell must end when reflection came
On what you had deemed me, whose one long aim
Had been to serve you; that what I sought
Lay not in a heart that could breathe such blame.

But yet I kissed you; whereon you again
As of old kissed me. Why, why was it so?
Do you cleave to me after that light-tongued blow?
If you scorned me at eventide, how love then?
The thing is dark, Dear. I do not know.

THE PHANTOM

That was once her casement,
And the taper nigh,
Shining from within there
Beckoned, "Here am I!"

Now, as then, I see her
Moving at the pane;
Ah; 'tis but her phantom
Borne within my brain!—

Foremost in my vision
Everywhere goes she;
Change dissolves the landscapes,
She abides with me.

Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,
Who can say thee nay?
Never once do I, Dear,
Wish thy ghost away.

THE END OF THE EPISODE

INDULGE no more may we
In this sweet-bitter pastime :
The love-light shines the last time
Between you, Sweet, and me.

There shall remain no trace
Of what so closely tied us,
And blank as ere love eyed us
Will be our meeting-place.

The flowers and thymy air,
Will they now miss our coming ?
The dumbles thin their humming
To find we haunt not there ?

Though fervent was our vow,
Though ruddily ran our pleasure,
Bliss has fulfilled its measure,
And sees its sentence now.

Ache deep ; but make no moans :
Smile out ; but stilly suffer :
The paths of love are rougher
Than thoroughfares of stones.

THE SIGH

LITTLE head against my shoulder,
Shy at first, then somewhat bolder,
And up-eyed ;
Till she, with a timid quaver,
Yielded to the kiss I gave her ;
But, she sighed.

That there mingled with her feeling
Some sad thought she was concealing
It implied.
—Not that she had ceased to love me,
None on earth she set above me ;
But she sighed.

She could not disguise a passion,
Dread, or doubt, in weakest fashion
If she tried:
Nothing seemed to hold us sundered,
Hearts were victors; so I wondered
Why she sighed.

Afterwards I knew her throughly,
And she loved me staunchly, truly,
Till she died;
But she never made confession
Why, at that first sweet concession,
She had sighed.

It was in our May, remember;
And though now I near November,
And abide
Till my appointed change, unfretting,
Sometimes I sit half regretting
That she sighed.

"IN THE NIGHT SHE CAME"

I TOLD her when I left one day
That whatsoever weight of care
Might strain our love, Time's mere assault
Would work no changes there.
And in the night she came to me,
Toothless, and wan, and old,
With leaden concaves round her eyes,
And wrinkles manifold.

I tremblingly exclaimed to her,
"O wherefore do you ghost me thus!
I have said that dull defacing Time
Will bring no dreads to us."
"And is that true of *you*?" she cried
In voice of troubled tune.
I faltered: "Well . . . I did not think
You would test me quite so soon!"

She vanished with a curious smile,
Which told me, plainlier than by word,
That my staunch pledge could scarce beguile
The fear she had averred.
Her doubts then wrought their shape in me,
And when next day I paid
My due caress, we seemed to be
Divided by some shade.

THE CONFORMERS

YES; we'll wed, my little fay,
And you shall write you mine,
And in a villa chastely gray
We'll house, and sleep, and dine.
But those night-screened, divine,
Stolen trysts of heretofore,
We of choice ecstasies and fine
Shall know no more.

The formal faced cohue
Will then no more upbraid
With smiting smiles and whisperings two
Who have thrown less loves in shade.
We shall no more evade
The searching light of the sun,
Our game of passion will be played,
Our dreaming done.

We shall not go in stealth
To rendezvous unknown,
But friends will ask me of your health,
And you about my own.
When we abide alone,
No leapings each to each,
But syllables in frigid tone
Of household speech.

When down to dust we glide
Men will not say askance,
As now: "How all the country side
Rings with their mad romance!"

But as they graveward glance
Remark: "In them we lose
A worthy pair, who helped advance
Sound parish views."

THE DAWN AFTER THE DANCE

HERE is your parents' dwelling with its curtained windows telling
Of no thought of us within it or of our arrival here;
Their slumbers have been normal after one day more of formal
Matrimonial commonplace and household life's mechanic gear.

I would be candid willingly, but dawn draws on so chillingly
As to render further cheerlessness intolerable now,
So I will not stand endeavouring to declare a day for severing,
But will clasp you just as always—just the olden love avow.

Through serene and surly weather we have walked the ways together,
And this long night's dance this year's end eve now finishes the spell;
Yet we dreamt us but beginning a sweet sempiternal spinning
Of a cord we have spun to breaking—too intemperately, too well.

Yes; last night we danced I know, Dear, as we did that year ago, Dear,
When a new strange bond between our days was formed, and felt, and heard;
Would that dancing were the worst thing from the latest to the first thing
That the faded year can charge us with; but what avails a word!

That which makes man's love the lighter and the woman's burn no brighter
Came to pass with us inevitably while slipped the shortening year. . . .
And there stands your father's dwelling with its blind bleak windows telling
That the vows of man and maid are frail as filmy gossamere.

WEYMOUTH, 1869.

THE SUN ON THE LETTER

I DREW the letter out, while gleamed
The sloping sun from under a roof
Of cloud whose verge rose visibly.

The burning ball flung rays that seemed
Stretched like a warp without a woof
Across the levels of the lea

To where I stood, and where they beamed
As brightly on the page of proof
That she had shown her false to me

As if it had shown her true—had teemed
With passionate thought for my behoof
Expressed with their own ardency!

THE NIGHT OF THE DANCE

THE cold moon hangs to the sky by its horn,
And centres its gaze on me;
The stars, like eyes in reverie,
Their westering as for a while forborne,
Quiz downward curiously.

Old Robert draws the backbrand in,
The green logs steam and spit;
The half-awakened sparrows flit
From the riddled thatch; and owls begin
To whoo from the gable-slit.

Yes; far and nigh things seem to know
Sweet scenes are impending here;
That all is prepared; that the hour is near
For welcomes, fellowships, and flow
Of sally, song, and cheer;

That spigots are pulled and viols strung;
That soon will arise the sound
Of measures trod to tunes renowned;
That She will return in Love's low tongue
My vows as we wheel around.

MISCONCEPTION

I BUSIED myself to find a sure
 Snug hermitage
That should preserve my Love secure
 From the world's rage;
Where no unseemly saturnals,
 Or strident traffic-roars,
Or hum of intervolved cabals
 Should echo at her doors.

I laboured that the diurnal spin
 Of vanities
Should not contrive to suck her in
 By dark degrees,
And cunningly operate to blur
 Sweet teachings I had begun;
And then I went full-heart to her
 To expound the glad deeds done.

She looked at me, and said thereto
 With a pitying smile,
"And *this* is what has busied you
 So long a while?
O poor exhausted one, I see
 You have worn you old and thin
For naught! Those moils you fear for me
 I find most pleasure in!"

THE VOICE OF THE THORN

I

WHEN the thorn on the down
Quivers naked and cold,
And the mid-aged and old
Pace the path there to town,
In these words dry and drear
It seems to them sighing:
"O winter is trying
To sojourners here!"

II

When it stands fully tressed
On a hot summer day,
And the ewes there astray
Find its shade a sweet rest,
By the breath of the breeze
It inquires of each farer:
"Who would not be sharer
Of shadow with these?"

III

But by day or by night,
And in winter or summer,
Should I be the comer
Along that lone height,
In its voicing to me
Only one speech is spoken:
"Here once was nigh broken
A heart, and by thee."

FROM HER IN THE COUNTRY

I THOUGHT and thought of thy crass clanging town
To folly, till convinced such dreams were ill,
I held my heart in bond, and tethered down
Fancy to where I was, by force of will.

I said: How beautiful are these flowers, this wood,
One little bud is far more sweet to me
Than all man's urban shows; and then I stood
Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree;

And strove to feel my nature brought it forth
Of instinct, or no rural maid was I;
But it was vain; for I could not see worth
Enough around to charm a midge or fly,

And mused again on city din and sin,
Longing to madness I might move therein!

16 W. P. V., 1866.

HER CONFESSION

As some bland soul, to whom a debtor says
"I'll now repay the amount I owe to you,"
In inward gladness feigns forgetfulness
That such a payment ever was his due

(His long thought notwithstanding), so did I
At our last meeting waive your proffered kiss
With quick divergent talk of scenery nigh,
By such suspension to enhance my bliss.

And as his looks in consternation fall
When, gathering that the debt is lightly deemed,
The debtor makes as not to pay at all,
So faltered I, when your intention seemed

Converted by my false uneagerness
To putting off for ever the caress.

W. P. V., 1865-67.

TO AN IMPERSONATOR OF ROSALIND

Did he who drew her in the years ago—
Till now conceived creator of her grace—
With telescopic sight high natures know,
Discern remote in Time's untravelled space

Your soft sweet mien, your gestures, as do we,
And with a copyist's hand but set them down,
Glowing yet more to dream our ecstasy
When his Original should be forthshown?

For, kindled by that animated eye,
Whereto all fairnesses about thee brim,
And by thy tender tones, what wight can fly
The wild conviction welling up in him

That he at length beholds woo, parley, plead,
The "very, very Rosalind" indeed!

8 Adelphi Terrace, *21st April* 1867.

TO AN ACTRESS

I READ your name when you were strange to me,
Where it stood blazoned bold with many more;
I passed it vacantly, and did not see
Any great glory in the shape it wore.

O cruelty, the insight barred me then!
Why did I not possess me with its sound,
And in its cadence catch and catch again
Your nature's essence floating therearound?

Could *that* man be this I, unknowing you,
When now the knowing you is all of me,
And the old world of then is now a new,
And purpose no more what it used to be—
A thing of formal journeywork, but due
To springs that then were sealed up utterly?

1867.

THE MINUTE BEFORE MEETING

THE grey gaunt days dividing us in twain
Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,
But they are gone; and now I would detain
The few clock-beats that part us; rein back Time,

And live in close expectance never closed
In change for far expectance closed at last,
So harshly has expectance been imposed
On my long need while these slow blank months passed.

And knowing that what is now about to be
Will all *have been* in O, so short a space!
I read beyond it my despondency
When more dividing months shall take its place,
Thereby denying to this hour of grace
A full-up measure of felicity.

1871.

HE ABJURES LOVE

AT last I put off love,
For twice ten years
The daysman of my thought,
And hope, and doing;
Being ashamed thereof,
And faint of fears
And desolations, wrought
In his pursuing,

Since first in youthtime those
Disquietings
That heart-enslavement brings
To hale and hoary,
Became my housefellows,
And, fool and blind,
I turned from kith and kind
To give him glory.

I was as children be
Who have no care;
I did not shrink or sigh,
I did not sicken;
But lo, Love beckoned me,
And I was bare,
And poor, and starved, and dry,
And fever-stricken.

Too many times ablaze
With fatuous fires,
Enkindled by his wiles
To new embraces,
Did I, by wilful ways
And baseless ires,
Return the anxious smiles
Of friendly faces.

No more will now rate I
The common rare,

The midnight drizzle dew,
The gray hour golden,
The wind a yearning cry,
The faulty fair,
Things dreamt, of comelier hue
Than things beholden! . . .

—I speak as one who plumbs
Life's dim profound,
One who at length can sound
Clear views and certain.
But—after love what comes?
A scene that lours,
A few sad vacant hours,
And then, the Curtain.

1883.

A SET OF COUNTRY SONGS

LET ME ENJOY

(MINOR KEY)

I

LET me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting Might
That fashioned forth its loveliness
Had other aims than my delight.

II

About my path there flits a Fair,
Who throws me not a word or sign;
I'll charm me with her ignoring air,
And laud the lips not meant for mine.

III

From manuscripts of moving song
Inspired by scenes and souls unknown,
I'll pour out raptures that belong
To others, as they were my own.

IV

And some day hence, toward Paradise
And all its blest—if such should be—
I will lift glad, afar-off eyes,
Though it contain no place for me.

AT CASTERBRIDGE FAIR

I

THE BALLAD-SINGER

SING, Ballad-singer, raise a hearty tune;
Make me forget that there was ever a one
I walked with in the meek light of the moon
When the day's work was done.

Rhyme, Ballad-rhymer, start a country song;
Make me forget that she whom I loved well
Swore she would love me dearly, love me long,
Then—what I cannot tell!

Sing, Ballad-singer, from your little book;
Make me forget those heart-breaks, achings, fears;
Make me forget her name, her sweet sweet look—
Make me forget her tears.

II

FORMER BEAUTIES

THESE market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
And tissues sere,
Are they the ones we loved in years agone,
And courted here?

Are these the muslined pink young things to whom
We vowed and swore
In nooks on summer Sundays by the Froom,
Or Budmouth shore?

Do they remember those gay tunes we trod
Clasped on the green;
Aye; trod till moonlight set on the beaten sod
A satin sheen?

They must forget, forget! They cannot know
What once they were,
Or memory would transfigure them, and show
Them always fair.

III

After the Club-Dance

Black'on frowns east on Maidon,
And westward to the sea,
But on neither is his frown laden
With scorn, as his frown on me!

At dawn my heart grew heavy,
I could not sip the wine,
I left the jocund bevy
And that young man o' mine.

The roadside elms pass by me,—
Why do I sink with shame
When the birds a-perch there eye me?
They, too, have done the same!

IV

The Market-Girl

Nobody took any notice of her as she stood on the causey kerb,
All eager to sell her honey and apples and bunches of garden herb;
And if she had offered to give her wares and herself with them too that day,
I doubt if a soul would have cared to take a bargain so choice away.

But chancing to trace her sunburnt grace that morning as I passed nigh,
I went and I said "Poor maidy dear!—and will none of the people buy?"
And so it began; and soon we knew what the end of it all must be,
And I found that though no others had bid, a prize had been won by me.

V

The Inquiry

And are ye one of Hermitage—
Of Hermitage, by Ivel Road,
And do ye know, in Hermitage
A thatch-roofed house where sengreens grow?

And does John Waywood live there still—
He of the name that there abode
When father hurdled on the hill
Some fifteen years ago?

Does he now speak o' Patty Beech,
The Patty Beech he used to—see,
Or ask at all if Patty Beech
Is known or heard of out this way?
—Ask ever if she's living yet,
And where her present home may be,
And how she bears life's fag and fret
After so long a day?

In years agone at Hermitage
This faded face was counted fair,
None fairer; and at Hermitage
We swore to wed when he should thrive.
But never a chance had he or I,
And waiting made his wish outwear,
And Time, that dooms man's love to die,
Preserves a maid's alive.

VI

A Wife Waits

Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
Where the tall liquor-cups foam;
I on the pavement up here by the Bow,
Wait, wait, to steady him home.

Will and his partner are treading a tune,
Loving companions they be;
Willy, before we were married in June,
Said he loved no one but me;

Said he would let his old pleasures all go
Ever to live with his Dear.
Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
Shivering I wait for him here.

Note.—"The Bow" (line 3). The old name for the curved corner by the cross-streets in the middle of Casterbridge.

VII

After the Fair

The singers are gone from the Cornmarket-place
With their broadsheets of rhymes,
The street rings no longer in treble and bass
With their skits on the times,
And the Cross, lately thronged, is a dim naked space
That but echoes the stammering chimes.

From Clock-corner steps, as each quarter ding-dongs,
Away the folk roam
By the "Hart" and Grey's Bridge into byways and "drongs,'
Or across the ridged loam;
The younger ones shrilling the lately heard songs,
The old saying, "Would we were home."

The shy-seeming maiden so mute in the fair
Now rattles and talks,
And that one who looked the most swaggering there
Grows sad as she walks,
And she who seemed eaten by cankering care
In statuesque sturdiness stalks.

And midnight clears High Street of all but the ghosts
Of its buried burghees,
From the latest far back to those old Roman hosts
Whose remains one yet sees,
Who loved, laughed, and fought, hailed their friends, drank their toasts
At their meeting-times here, just as these!

1902.

Note.—"The Chimes" (line 6) will be listened for in vain here at midnight now, having been abolished some years ago.

THE DARK-EYED GENTLEMAN

I

I PITCHED my day's leazings in Crimmercrock Lane,
To tie up my garter and jog on again,
When a dear dark-eyed gentleman passed there and said,
In a way that made all o' me colour rose-red,
"What do I see—
O pretty knee!"
And he came and he tied up my garter for me.

II

'Twixt sunset and moonrise it was, I can mind:
Ah, 'tis easy to lose what we nevermore find!—
Of the dear stranger's home, of his name, I knew nought,
But I soon knew his nature and all that it brought.
Then bitterly
Sobbed I that he
Should ever have tied up my garter for me!

III

Yet now I've beside me a fine lissom lad,
And my slip's nigh forgot, and my days are not sad;
My own dearest joy is he, comrade, and friend,
He it is who safe-guards me, on him I depend;
No sorrow brings he,
And thankful I be
That his daddy once tied up my garter for me!

NOTE—"Leazings" (line 1), bundle of gleaned corn.

TO CARREY CLAVEL

YOU turn your back, you turn your back,
And never your face to me,
Alone you take your homeward track,
And scorn my company.

What will you do when Charley's seen
Dewbeating down this way?
—You'll turn your back as now, you mean?
Nay, Carrey Clavel, nay!

You'll see none's looking; put your lip
Up like a tulip, so;
And he will coll you, bend, and sip:
Yes, Carrey, yes; I know!

THE ORPHANED OLD MAID

I WANTED to marry, but father said, "No—
'Tis weakness in women to give themselves so;
If you care for your freedom you'll listen to me,
Make a spouse in your pocket, and let the men be."

I spake on't again and again: father cried,
"Why—if you go husbanding, where shall I bide?
For never a home's for me elsewhere than here!"
And I yielded; for father had ever been dear.

But now father's gone, and I feel growing old,
And I'm lonely and poor in this house on the wold,
And my sweetheart that was found a partner elsewhere,
And nobody flings me a thought or a care.

THE SPRING CALL

DOWN Wessex way, when spring's a-shine,
The blackbird's "pret-ty de-urr!"
In Wessex accents marked as mine
Is heard afar and near.

He flutes it strong, as if in song
No R's of feebler tone
Than his appear in "pretty dear,"
Have blackbirds ever known.

Yet they pipe "prattie deerh!" I glean,
Beneath a Scottish sky,

And "pehty de-aw!" amid the treen
Of Middlesex or nigh.

While some folk say—perhaps in play—
Who know the Irish isle,
'Tis "purrity dare!" in treeland there
When songsters would beguile.

Well: I'll say what the listening birds
Say, hearing "pret-ty de-urr!"—
However strangers sound such words,
That's how we sound them here.

Yes, in this clime at pairing time,
As soon as eyes can see her
At dawn of day, the proper way
To call is "pret-ty de-urr!"

JULIE-JANE

SING; how 'a would sing!
How 'a would raise the tune
When we rode in the waggon from harvesting
By the light o' the moon!

Dance; how 'a would dance!
If a fiddlestring did but sound
She would hold out her coats, give a slanting glance,
And go round and round.

Laugh; how 'a would laugh!
Her peony lips would part
As if none such a place for a lover to quaff
At the deeps of a heart.

Julie, O girl of joy,
Soon, soon that lover he came.
Ah, yes; and gave thee a baby-boy,
But never his name. . . .

—Tolling for her, as you guess;
And the baby too. . . . 'Tis well.
You knew her in maidhood likewise?—Yes,
That's her burial bell.

"I suppose," with a laugh, she said,
"I should blush that I'm not a wife;
But how can it matter, so soon to be dead,
What one does in life!"

When we sat making the mourning
By her death-bed side, said she,
"Dears, how can you keep from your lovers, adorning
In honour of me!"

Bubbling and brightsome eyed!
But now—O never again.
She chose her bearers before she died
From her fancy-men.

NOTE.—It is, or was, a common custom in Wessex, and probably other country places, to prepare the mourning beside the death-bed, the dying person sometimes assisting, who also selects his or her bearers on such occasions.

"Coats" (line 7), old name for petticoats.



NEWS FOR HER MOTHER

I

ONE mile more is
Where your door is,
Mother mine!—
Harvest's coming,
Mills are strumming,
Apples fine,
And the cider made to-year will be as wine.

II

Yet, not viewing
What's a-doing
Here around
Is it thrills me,
And so fills me
That I bound
Like a ball or leaf or lamb along the ground.

III

Tremble not now
At your lot now,
Silly soul!
Hosts have sped them
Quick to wed them,
Great and small,
Since the first two sighing half-hearts made a whole.

IV

Yet I wonder,
Will it sunder
Her from me?
Will she guess that
I said "Yes,"—that
His I'd be,
Ere I thought she might not see him as I see!

V

Old brown gable,
Granary, stable,
Here you are!
O my mother,
Can another
Ever bar
Mine from thy heart, make thy nearness seem afar?

THE FIDDLER

THE fiddler knows what's brewing
To the lilt of his lyric wiles:
The fiddler knows what rueing
Will come of this night's smiles!

He sees couples join them for dancing,
And afterwards joining for life,
He sees them pay high for their prancing
By a welter of wedded strife.

He twangs: "Music hails from the devil,
Though vaunted to come from heaven,
For it makes people do at a revel
What multiplies sins by seven.

"There's many a heart now mangled,
And waiting its time to go,
Whose tendrils were first entangled
By my sweet viol and bow!"

THE HUSBAND'S VIEW

"CAN anything avail
Beldame, for my hid grief?—
Listen: I'll tell the tale,
It may bring faint relief!—

"I came where I was not known,
In hope to flee my sin;
And walking forth alone
A young man said, 'Good e'en,'

"In gentle voice and true
He asked to marry me;
'You only—only you
Fulfil my dream!' said he.

"We married o' Monday morn,
In the month of hay and flowers;
My cares were nigh forsworn,
And perfect love was ours.

"But ere the days are long
Untimely fruit will show;
My Love keeps up his song,
Undreaming it is so.

"And I awake in the night,
And think of months gone by,
And of that cause of flight
Hidden from my Love's eye.

"Discovery borders near,
And then! . . . But something stirred?—
My husband—he is here!
Heaven—has he overheard?"—

"Yes; I have heard, sweet Nan;
I have known it all the time.
I am not a particular man;
Misfortunes are no crime:

"And what with our serious need
Of sons for soldiering,
That accident, indeed,
To maids, is a useful thing!"

ROSE-ANN

WHY didn't you say you was promised, Rose-Ann?
  Why didn't you name it to me,
Ere ever you tempted me hither, Rose-Ann,
  So often, so wearifully?

O why did you let me be near 'ee, Rose-Ann,
  Talking things about wedlock so free,
And never by nod or by whisper, Rose-Ann,
  Give a hint that it wasn't to be?

Down home I was raising a flock of stock ewes,
  Cocks and hens, and wee chickens by scores,
And lavendered linen all ready to use,
  A-dreaming that they would be yours.

Mother said: "She's a sport-making maiden, my son";
  And a pretty sharp quarrel had we;
O why do you prove by this wrong you have done
  That I saw not what mother could see?

Never once did you say you was promised, Rose-Ann,
  Never once did I dream it to be;
And it cuts to the heart to be treated, Rose-Ann,
  As you in your scorning treat me!

THE HOMECOMING

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.

"Now don't ye rub your eyes so red; we're home and have no cares;
Here's a skimmer-cake for supper, peckled onions, and some pears;
I've got a little keg o' summat strong, too, under stairs:
—What, slight your husband's victuals? Other brides can tackle theirs!"

The wind of winter mooed and mouthed their chimney like a horn,
And round the house and past the house 'twas leafless and lorn.

"But my dear and tender poppet, then, how came ye to agree
In Ivel church this morning? Sure, there-right you married me!"
—"Hoo-hoo!—I don't know—I forgot how strange and far 'twould be,
An' I wish I was at home again with dear daddee!"

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and few came there.

"I didn't think such furniture as this was all you'd own,
And great black beams for ceiling, and a floor o' wretched stone,
And nasty pewter platters, horrid forks of steel and bone,
And a monstrous crock in chimney. 'Twas to me quite unbeknown!"

Rattle rattle went the door; down flapped a cloud of smoke,
As shifting north the wicked wind assayed a smarter stroke.

"Now sit ye by the fire, poppet; put yourself at ease:
And keep your little thumb out of your mouth, dear, please!
And I'll sing to 'ee a pretty song of lovely flowers and bees,
And happy lovers taking walks within a grove o' trees."

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.

"Now, don't ye gnaw your handkercher; 'twill hurt your little
tongue,
And if you do feel spitish, 'tis because ye are over young;
But you'll be getting older, like us all, ere very long,
And you'll see me as I am—a man who never did 'ee wrong."

Straight from Whit'sheet Hill to Benvill Lane the blusters pass,
Hitting hedges, milestones, handposts, trees, and tufts of grass.

"Well, had I only known, my dear, that this was how you'd be,
I'd have married her of riper years that was so fond of me.
But since I can't, I've half a mind to run away to sea,
And leave 'ee to go barefoot to your d—d daddee!"

Up one wall and down the other—past each window-pane—
Prance the gusts, and then away down Crimmercrock's long lane.

"I—I—don't know what to say to't, since your wife I've vowed
to be;
And as 'tis done, I s'pose here I must bide—poor me!
Aye—as you are ki-ki-kind, I'll try to live along with 'ee,
Although I'd fain have stayed at home with dear daddee!"

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and few came there.

"That's right, my Heart! And though on haunted Toller Down
we be,
And the wind swears things in chimley, we'll to supper merrily!
So don't ye tap your shoe so pettish-like; but smile at me,
And ye'll soon forget to sock and sigh for dear daddee!"

December 1901.

PIECES OCCASIONAL AND VARIOUS

A CHURCH ROMANCE

(*Mellstock: circa* 1835)

SHE turned in the high pew, until her sight
Swept the west gallery, and caught its row
Of music-men with viol, book, and bow
Against the sinking sad tower-window light.

She turned again; and in her pride's despite
One strenuous viol's inspirer seemed to throw
A message from his string to her below,
Which said: "I claim thee as my own forthright!"

Thus their hearts' bond began, in due time signed.
And long years thence, when Age had scared Romance,
At some old attitude of his or glance
That gallery-scene would break upon her mind,
With him as minstrel, ardent, young, and trim,
Bowing "New Sabbath" or "Mount Ephraim."

THE RASH BRIDE

AN EXPERIENCE OF THE MELLSTOCK QUIRE

I

WE Christmas-carolled down the Vale, and up the Vale, and round the Vale,
We played and sang that night as we were yearly wont to do—
A carol in a minor key, a carol in the major D,
Then at each house: "Good wishes: many Christmas joys to you!"

II

Next, to the widow's John and I and all the rest drew on. And I
Discerned that John could hardly hold the tongue of him for joy.
The widow was a sweet young thing whom John was bent on marrying,
And quiring at her casement seemed romantic to the boy.

III

"She'll make reply, I trust," said he, "to our salute? She must!" said he,
"And then I will accost her gently—much to her surprise!—
For knowing not I am with you here, when I speak up and call her dear
A tenderness will fill her voice, a bashfulness her eyes."

IV

So, by her window-square we stood; ay, with our lanterns there we stood,
And he along with us,—not singing, waiting for a sign;
And when we'd quired her carols three a light was lit and out looked she,
A shawl about her bedgown, and her colour red as wine.

V

And sweetly then she bowed her thanks, and smiled, and spoke aloud her thanks;
When lo, behind her back there, in the room, a man appeared.
I knew him—one from Woolcomb way—Giles Swetman—honest as the day,
But eager, hasty; and I felt that some strange trouble neared.

VI

"How comes he there? . . . Suppose," said we, "she's wed!" said we. "Who knows?" said we.
—"She married yester-morning—only mother yet has known
The secret o't!" shrilled one small boy. "But now I've told, let's wish 'em joy!"
A heavy fall aroused us: John had gone down like a stone.

VII*

We rushed to him and caught him round, and lifted him, and brought him round,
When, hearing something wrong had happened, oped the window she:
"Has one of you fallen ill?" she asked, "by these night labours overtasked?"
None answered. That she'd done poor John a cruel turn felt we.

VIII

Till up spoke Michael: "Fie, young dame! You've broke your promise, sly young dame,
By forming this new tie, young dame, and jilting John so true,
Who trudged to-night to sing to 'ee because he thought he'd bring to 'ee
Good wishes as your coming spouse. May ye such trifling rue!"

IX

Her man had said no word at all; but being behind had heard it all,
And now cried: "Neighbours, on my soul I knew not 'twas like this!"
And then to her: "If I had known you'd had in tow not me alone,
No wife should you have been of mine. It is a dear bought bliss!"

X

She changed death-white, and heaved a cry: we'd never heard so grieved a cry
As came from her at this from him: heartbroken quite seemed she;
And suddenly, as we looked on, she turned, and rushed; and she was gone,
Whither, her husband, following after, knew not; nor knew we.

XI

We searched till dawn about the house; within the house, without the house,
We searched among the laurel boughs that grew beneath the wall,

And then among the crocks and things, and stores for winter
junketings,
In linhay, loft, and dairy; but we found her not at all.

XII

Then John rushed in: "O friends," he said, "hear this, this,
this!" and bends his head:
"I've—searched round by the—*well*, and find the cover open
wide!
I am fearful that—I can't say what . . . Bring lanterns, and
some cords to knot."
We did so, and we went and stood the deep dark hole beside.

XIII

And then they, ropes in hand, and I—ay, John, and all the band,
and I
Let down a lantern to the depths—some hundred feet and more;
It glimmered like a fog-dimmed star; and there, beside its light,
afar,
White drapery floated, and we knew the meaning that it bore.

XIV

The rest is naught. . . . We buried her o' Sunday. Neighbours
carried her;
And Swetman—he who'd married her—now miserablest of men,
Walked mourning first; and then walked John; just quivering,
but composed anon;
And we the quire formed round the grave, as was the custom
then.

XV

Our old bass player, as I recall—his white hair blown—but why
recall!—
His viol upstrapped, bent figure—doomed to follow her full
soon—
Stood bowing, pale and tremulous; and next to him the rest
of us. . . .
We sang the Ninetieth Psalm to her—set to Saint Stephen's
tune,

THE DEAD QUIRE

I

Beside the Mead of Memories,
Where Church-way mounts to Moaning Hill,
The sad man sighed his phantasies:
He seems to sigh them still.

II

"'Twas the Birth-tide Eve, and the hamleteers
Made merry with ancient Mellstock zest,
But the Mellstock quire of former years
Had entered into rest.

III

"Old Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
And Reuben and Michael a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind.

IV

"The singers had followed one by one,
Treble, and tenor, and thorough-bass;
And the worm that wasteth had begun
To mine their mouldering place.

V

"For two-score years, ere Christ-day light,
Mellstock had throbbed to strains from these;
But now there echoed on the night
No Christmas harmonies.

VI

"Three meadows off, at a dormered inn,
The youth had gathered in high carouse,
And, ranged on settles, some therein
Had drunk them to a drowse.

VII

"Loud, lively, reckless, some had grown,
Each dandling on his jigging knee
Eliza, Dolly, Nance, or Joan—
Livers in levity.

VIII

"The taper flames and hearthfire shine
Grew smoke-hazed to a lurid light,
And songs on subjects not divine
Were warbled forth that night.

IX

"Yet many were sons and grandsons here
Of those who, on such eves gone by,
At that still hour had throated clear
Their anthems to the sky.

X

"The clock belled midnight; and ere long
One shouted, 'Now 'tis Christmas morn;
Here's to our women old and young,
And to John Barleycorn!'

XI

"They drink the toast and shout again:
The pewter-ware rings back the boom,
And for a breath-while follows then
A silence in the room.

XII

"When nigh without, as in old days,
The ancient quire of voice and string
Seemed singing words of prayer and praise
As they had used to sing:

XIII

"*While shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,*—
Thus swells the long familiar sound

In many a quaint symphonic flight—
To, *Glory shone around.*

XIV

"The sons defined their fathers' tones,
The widow his whom she had wed,
And others in the minor moans
The viols of the dead.

XV

"Something supernal has the sound
As verse by verse the strain proceeds,
And stilly staring on the ground
Each roysterer holds and heeds.

XVI

"Towards its chorded closing bar
Plaintively, thinly, waned the hymn,
Yet lingered, like the notes afar
Of banded seraphim.

XVII

"With brows abashed, and reverent tread,
The hearkeners sought the tavern door:
But nothing, save wan moonlight, spread
The empty highway o'er.

XVIII

"While on their hearing fixed and tense
The aerial music seemed to sink,
As it were gently moving thence
Along the river brink.

XIX

"Then did the Quick pursue the Dead
By crystal Froom that crinkles there;
And still the viewless quire ahead
Voiced the old holy air.

XX

"By Bank-walk wicket, brightly bleached,
It passed, and 'twixt the hedges twain,
Dogged by the living; till it reached
The bottom of Church Lane.

XXI

"There, at the turning, it was heard
Drawing to where the churchyard lay:
But when they followed thitherward
It smalled, and died away.

XXII

"Each headstone of the quire, each mound,
Confronted them beneath the moon;
But no more floated therearound
That ancient Birth-night tune.

XXIII

"There Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
There Reuben and Michael, a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind. . . .

XXIV

"As from a dream each sobered son
Awoke, and musing reached his door:
'Twas said that of them all, not one
Sat in a tavern more."

XXV

—The sad man ceased; and ceased to heed
His listener, and crossed the leaze
From Moaning Hill towards the mead—
The Mead of Memories.

1897.

THE CHRISTENING

WHOSE child is this they bring
Into the aisle?—
At so superb a thing
The congregation smile
And turn their heads awhile.

Its eyes are blue and bright,
Its cheeks like rose;
Its simple robes unite
Whitest of calicoes
With lawn, and satin bows.

A pride in the human race
At this paragon
Of mortals, lights each face
While the old rite goes on;
But ah, they are shocked anon.

What girl is she who peeps
From the gallery stair,
Smiles palely, redly weeps,
With feverish furtive air
As though not fitly there?

"I am the baby's mother;
This gem of the race
The decent fain would smother,
And for my deep disgrace
I am bidden to leave the place."

"Where is the baby's father?"—
"In the woods afar.
He says there is none he'd rather
Meet under moon or star
Than me, of all that are.

"To clasp me in lovelike weather,
Wish fixing when,
He says: To be together
At will, just now and then,
Makes him the blest of men;

"But chained and doomed for life
  To slovening
As vulgar man and wife,
He says, is another thing:
Yea: sweet Love's sepulchring!"

1904.

A DREAM QUESTION

"It shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine."
Micah iii. 6.

I ASKED the Lord: "Sire, is this true
Which hosts of theologians hold,
That when we creatures censure you
For shaping griefs and ails untold
(Deeming them punishments undue)
You rage, as Moses wrote of old?

When we exclaim: 'Beneficent
He is not, for he orders pain,
Or, if so, not omnipotent:
To a mere child the thing is plain!'
Those who profess to represent
You, cry out: 'Impious and profane!'"

He: "Save me from my friends, who deem
That I care what my creatures say!
Mouth as you list: sneer, rail, blaspheme,
O manikin, the livelong day,
Not one grief-groan or pleasure-gleam
Will you increase or take away.

"Why things are thus, whoso derides,
May well remain my secret still . . . .
A fourth dimension, say the guides,
To matter is conceivable.
Think some such mystery resides
Within the ethic of my will."

BY THE BARROWS

NOT far from Mellstock—so tradition saith—
Where barrows, bulging as they bosoms were
Of Multimammia stretched supinely there,
Catch night and noon the tempest's wanton breath,

A battle, desperate doubtless unto death,
Was one time fought. The outlook, lone and bare,
The towering hawk and passing raven share,
And all the upland round is called "The He'th."

Here once a woman, in our modern age,
Fought singlehandedly to shield a child—
One not her own—from a man's senseless rage.
And to my mind no patriots' bones there piled
So consecrate the silence as her deed
Of stoic and devoted self-unheed.

A WIFE AND ANOTHER

"WAR ends, and he's returning
Early; yea,
The evening next to-morrow's!"—
—This I say
To her, whom I suspiciously survey,

Holding my husband's letter
To her view.—
She glanced at it but lightly,
And I knew
That one from him that day had reached her too.

There was no time for scruple;
Secretly
I filched her missive, conned it,
Learnt that he
Would lodge with her ere he came home to me.

To reach the port before her,
And, unscanned,
There wait to intercept them
Soon I planned:
That, in her stead, *I* might before him stand.

So purposed, so effected;
At the inn
Assigned, I found her hidden:—
O that sin
Should bear what she bore when I entered in!

Her heavy lids grew laden
With despairs,
Her lips made soundless movements
Unawares,
While I peered at the chamber hired as theirs.

And as beside its doorway,
Deadly hued,
One inside, one withoutside
We two stood,
He came—my husband—as she knew he would.

No pleasurable triumph
Was that sight!
The ghastly disappointment
Broke them quite.
What love was theirs, to move them with such might!

"Madam, forgive me!" said she,
Sorrow bent,
"A child—I soon shall bear him. . . .
Yes—I meant
To tell you—that he won me ere he went."

Then, as it were, within me
Something snapped,
As if my soul had largened:
Conscience-capped,
I saw myself the snarer—them the trapped.

"My hate dies, and I promise,
Grace-beguiled,"

I said, "to care for you, be
Reconciled;
And cherish, and take interest in the child."

Without more words I pressed him
Through the door
Within which she stood, powerless
To say more,
And closed it on them, and downstairward bore.

"He joins his wife—my sister,"
I, below,
Remarked in going—lightly—
Even as though
All had come right, and we had arranged it so.

As I, my road retracing,
Left them free,
The night alone embracing
Childless me,
I held I had not stirred God wrothfully.

THE ROMAN ROAD

THE Roman Road runs straight and bare
As the pale parting-line in hair
Across the heath. And thoughtful men
Contrast its days of Now and Then,
And delve, and measure, and compare;

Visioning on the vacant air
Helmed legionaries, who proudly rear
The Eagle, as they pace again
The Roman Road.

But no tall brass-helmed legionnaire
Haunts it for me. Uprises there
A mother's form upon my ken,
Guiding my infant steps, as when
We walked that ancient thoroughfare,
The Roman Road.

THE VAMPIRINE FAIR

GILBERT had sailed to India's shore,
    And I was all alone:
My lord came in at my open door
    And said, "O fairest one!"

He leant upon the slant bureau,
    And sighed, "I am sick for thee!"
"My Lord," said I, "pray speak not so,
    Since wedded wife I be."

Leaning upon the slant bureau,
    Bitter his next words came:
"So much I know; and likewise know
    My love burns on the same!

"But since you thrust my love away,
    And since it knows no cure,
I must live out as best I may
    The ache that I endure."

When Michaelmas browned the nether Coomb,
    And Wingreen Hill above,
And made the hollyhocks rags of bloom,
    My lord grew ill of love.

My lord grew ill with love for me;
    Gilbert was far from port;
And—so it was—that time did see
    Me housed at Manor Court.

About the bowers of Manor Court
    The primrose pushed its head
When, on a day at last, report
    Arrived of him I had wed.

"Gilbert, my Lord, is homeward bound,
    His sloop is drawing near,
What shall I do when I am found
    Not in his house but here?"

"O I will heal the injuries
I've done to him and thee.
I'll give him means to live at ease
Afar from Shastonb'ry."

When Gilbert came we both took thought:
"Since comfort and good cheer,"
Said he, "So readily are bought,
He's welcome to thee, Dear."

So when my lord flung liberally
His gold in Gilbert's hands,
I coaxed and got my brothers three
Made stewards of his lands.

And then I coaxed him to install
My other kith and kin,
With aim to benefit them all
Before his love ran thin.

And next I craved to be possessed
Of plate and jewels rare.
He groaned: "You give me, Love, no rest,
Take all the law will spare!"

And so in course of years my wealth
Became a goodly hoard,
My steward brethren, too, by stealth
Had each a fortune stored.

Thereafter in the gloom he'd walk,
And by and by began
To say aloud in absent talk,
"I am a ruined man!—

"I hardly could have thought," he said,
"When first I looked on thee,
That one so soft, so rosy red,
Could thus have beggared me!"

Seeing his fair estates in pawn,
And him in such decline,
I knew that his domain had gone
To lift up me and mine.

Next month upon a Sunday morn
 A gunshot sounded nigh:
By his own hand my lordly born
 Had doomed himself to die.

"Live, my dear Lord, and much of thine
 Shall be restored to thee!"
He smiled, and said 'twixt word and sign,
 "Alas—that cannot be!"

And while I searched his cabinet
 For letters, keys, or will,
'Twas touching that his gaze was set
 With love upon me still.

And when I burnt each document
 Before his dying eyes,
'Twas sweet that he did not resent
 My fear of compromise.

The steeple-cock gleamed golden when
 I watched his spirit go:
And I became repentant then
 That I had wrecked him so.

Three weeks at least had come and gone,
 With many a saddened word,
Before I wrote to Gilbert on
 The stroke that so had stirred.

And having worn a mournful gown,
 I joined, in decent while,
My husband at a dashing town
 To live in dashing style.

Yet though I now enjoy my fling,
 And dine and dance and drive,
I'd give my prettiest emerald ring
 To see my lord alive.

And when the meet on hunting-days
 Is near his churchyard home,
I leave my bantering beaux to place
 A flower upon his tomb;

And sometimes say: "Perhaps too late
The saints in Heaven deplore
That tender time when, moved by Fate,
He darked my cottage door."

THE REMINDER

WHILE I watch the Christmas blaze
Paint the room with ruddy rays,
Something makes my vision glide
To the frosty scene outside.

There, to reach a rotting berry,
Toils a thrush,—constrained to very
Dregs of food by sharp distress,
Taking such with thankfulness.

Why, O starving bird, when I
One day's joy would justify,
And put misery out of view,
Do you make me notice you!

THE RAMBLER

I DO not see the hills around,
Nor mark the tints the copses wear;
I do not note the grassy ground
And constellated daisies there.

I hear not the contralto note
Of cuckoos hid on either hand,
The whirr that shakes the nighthawk's throat
When eve's brown awning hoods the land.

Some say each songster, tree, and mead—
All eloquent of love divine—
Receives their constant careful heed:
Such keen appraisement is not mine.

The tones around me that I hear,
The aspects, meanings, shapes I see,
Are those far back ones missed when near,
And now perceived too late by me!

NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME

WHEN the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,
And from hall and parlour the living have gone to their rest,
My perished people who housed them here come back to me.

They come and seat them around in their mouldy places,
Now and then bending towards me a glance of wistfulness,
A strange upbraiding smile upon all their faces,
And in the bearing of each a passive tristfulness.

"Do you uphold me, lingering and languishing here,
A pale late plant of your once strong stock?" I say to them;
"A thinker of crooked thoughts upon Life in the sere,
And on That which consigns men to night after showing the day
to them?"

"—O let be the Wherefore! We fevered our years not thus:
Take of Life what it grants, without question!" they answer me
seemingly.
"Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely like us,
And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time away beamingly!"

AFTER THE LAST BREATH

(J. H. 1813–1904)

THERE'S no more to be done, or feared, or hoped;
None now need watch, speak low, and list, and tire;
No irksome crease outsmoothed, no pillow sloped
Does she require.

Blankly we gaze. We are free to go or stay;
Our morrow's anxious plans have missed their aim;
Whether we leave to-night or wait till day
Counts as the same.

The lettered vessels of medicaments
Seem asking wherefore we have set them here;
Each palliative its silly face presents
As useless gear.

And yet we feel that something savours well;
We note a numb relief withheld before;
Our well-beloved is prisoner in the cell
Of Time no more.

We see by littles now the deft achievement
Whereby she has escaped the Wrongers all,
In view of which our momentary bereavement
Outshapes but small.

1904.

IN CHILDBED

In the middle of the night
Mother's spirit came and spoke to me,
Looking weariful and white—
As 'twere untimely news she broke to me.

"O my daughter, joyed are you
To own the weetless child you mother there;
'Men may search the wide world through,'
You think, 'nor find so fair another there!'

"Dear, this midnight time unwombs
Thousands just as rare and beautiful;
Thousands whom High Heaven foredooms
To be as bright, as good, as dutiful.

"Source of ecstatic hopes and fears,
And innocent maternal vanity,
Your fond exploit but shapes for tears
New thoroughfares in sad humanity.

"Yet as you dream, so dreamt I
When Life stretched forth its morning ray to me;
Other views for by and by!" . . . .
Such strange things did mother say to me.

THE PINE PLANTERS

(MARTY SOUTH'S REVERIE)

I

WE work here together
    In blast and breeze;
He fills the earth in,
    I hold the trees.

He does not notice
    That what I do
Keeps me from moving
    And chills me through.

He has seen one fairer
    I feel by his eye,
Which skims me as though
    I were not by.

And since she passed here
    He scarce has known
But that the woodland
        Holds him alone.

I have worked here with him
    Since morning shine,
He busy with his thoughts
    And I with mine.

I have helped him so many,
    So many days,
But never win any
    Small word of praise!

Shall I not sigh to him
    That I work on
Glad to be nigh to him
    Though hope is gone?

Nay, though he never
    Knew love like mine,
I'll bear it ever
    And make no sign!

II

From the bundle at hand here
    I take each tree,
And set it to stand, here
    Always to be;
When, in a second,
    As if from fear
Of Life unreckoned
    Beginning here,
It starts a sighing
    Through day and night,
Though while there lying
    'Twas voiceless quite.

It will sigh in the morning,
    Will sigh at noon,
At the winter's warning,
    In wafts of June;
Grieving that never
    Kind Fate decreed
It should for ever
    Remain a seed,
And shun the welter
    Of things without,
Unneeding shelter
    From storm and drought.

Thus, all unknowing
    For whom or what
We set it growing
    In this bleak spot,
It still will grieve here
    Throughout its time,
Unable to leave here,
    Or change its clime;

Or tell the story
Of us to-day
When, halt and hoary,
We pass away.

THE DEAR

I PLODDED to Fairmile Hill-top, where
A maiden one fain would guard
From every hazard and every care
Advanced on the roadside sward.

I wondered how succeeding suns
Would shape her wayfarings,
And wished some Power might take such ones
Under Its warding wings.

The busy breeze came up the hill
And smartened her cheek to red,
And frizzled her hair to a haze. With a will
"Good-morning, my Dear!" I said.

She glanced from me to the far-off gray,
And, with proud severity,
"Good-morning to you—though I may say
I am not *your* Dear," quoth she:

"For I am the Dear of one not here—
One far from his native land!"—
And she passed me by; and I did not try
To make her understand.

1901.

ONE WE KNEW

(M. H. 1772–1857)

SHE told how they used to form for the country dances—
"The Triumph," "The New-rigged Ship"—
To the light of the guttering wax in the panelled manses,
And in cots to the blink of a dip.

She spoke of the wild "poussetting" and "allemanding"
On carpet, on oak, and on sod;
And the two long rows of ladies and gentlemen standing,
And the figures the couples trod.

She showed us the spot where the maypole was yearly planted,
And where the bandsmen stood
While breeched and kerchiefed partners whirled, and panted
To choose each other for good.

She told of that far-back day when they learnt astounded
Of the death of the King of France:
Of the Terror; and then of Bonaparte's unbounded
Ambition and arrogance.

Of how his threats woke warlike preparations
Along the southern strand,
And how each night brought tremors and trepidations
Lest morning should see him land.

She said she had often heard the gibbet creaking
As it swayed in the lightning flash,
Had caught from the neighbouring town a small child's shrieking
At the cart-tail under the lash. . . .

With cap-framed face and long gaze into the embers—
We seated around her knees—
She would dwell on such dead themes, not as one who remembers,
But rather as one who sees.

She seemed one left behind of a band gone distant
So far that no tongue could hail:
Past things retold were to her as things existent,
Things present but as a tale.

May 20, 1902.

SHE HEARS THE STORM

THERE was a time in former years—
While my roof-tree was his—
When I should have been distressed by fears
At such a night as this!

I should have murmured anxiously,
"The pricking rain strikes cold;
His road is bare of hedge or tree,
And he is getting old."

But now the fitful chimney-roar,
The drone of Thorncombe trees,
The Froom in flood upon the moor,
The mud of Mellstock Leaze,

The candle slanting sooty wick'd,
The thuds upon the thatch,
The eaves-drops on the window flicked,
len-hatch,

And what they mean to wayfarers,
I scarcely heed or mind;
He has won that storm-tight roof of hers
Which Earth grants all her kind.

A WET NIGHT

I PACE along, the rain-shafts riddling me,
Mile after mile out by the moorland way,
And up the hill, and through the ewe-leaze gray
Into the lane, and round the corner tree;

Where, as my clothing clams me, mire-bestarred,
And the enfeebled light dies out of day,
Leaving the liquid shades to reign, I say,
"This is a hardship to be calendared!"

Yet sires of mine now perished and forgot,
When worse beset, ere roads were shapen here,
And night and storm were foes indeed to fear,
Times numberless have trudged across this spot
In sturdy muteness on their strenuous lot,
And taking all such toils as trifles mere.

BEFORE LIFE AND AFTER

A TIME there was—as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell—
Before the birth of consciousness,
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
How long, how long?

NEW YEAR'S EVE

"I HAVE finished another year," said God,
"In grey, green, white, and brown;
I have strewn the leaf upon the sod,
Sealed up the worm within the clod,
And let the last sun down."

"And what's the good of it?" I said,
"What reasons made you call
From formless void this earth we tread,
When nine-and-ninety can be read
Why nought should be at all?

"Yea, Sire; why shaped you us, 'who in
This tabernacle groan'—
If ever a joy be found herein,
Such joy no man had wished to win
If he had never known!"

Then he: "My labours—logicless—
You may explain; not I:
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
That I evolved a Consciousness
To ask for reasons why.

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethic tests I never knew,
Or made provision for!"

He sank to raptness as of yore,
And opening New Year's Day
Wove it by rote as theretofore,
And went on working evermore
In his unweeting way.

1906.

GOD'S EDUCATION

I SAW him steal the light away
That haunted in her eye:
It went so gently none could say
More than that it was there one day
And missing by-and-by.

I watched her longer, and he stole
Her lily tincts and rose;
All her young sprightliness of soul
Next fell beneath his cold control,
And disappeared like those.

I asked: "Why do you serve her so?
Do you, for some glad day,
Hoard these her sweets—?" He said, "O no,
They charm not me; I bid Time throw
Them carelessly away."

Said I: "We call that cruelty—
We, your poor mortal kind."

He mused. "The thought is new to me.
Forsooth, though I men's master be,
Theirs is the teaching mind!"

TO SINCERITY

O SWEET sincerity!—
Where modern methods be
What scope for thine and thee?

Life may be sad past saying,
Its greens for ever graying,
Its faiths to dust decaying;

And youth may have foreknown it,
And riper seasons shown it,
But custom cries: "Disown it:

"Say ye rejoice, though grieving,
Believe, while unbelieving,
Behold, without perceiving!"

—Yet, would men look at true things,
And unilluded view things,
And count to bear undue things,

The real might mend the seeming,
Facts better their foredeeming,
And Life its disesteeming.

February 1899.

PANTHERA

(For other forms of this legend—first met with in the second century—see Origen contra Celsum; the Talmud; Sepher Toldoth Jeschu; quoted fragments of lost Apocryphal gospels; Strauss, Haeckel; etc.)

YEA, as I sit here, crutched, and cricked, and bent,
I think of Panthera, who underwent
Much from insidious aches in his decline;
But his aches were not radical like mine;

They were the twinges of old wounds—the feel
Of the hand he had lost, shorn by barbarian steel,
Which came back, so he said, at a change in the air,
Fingers and all, as if it still were there.
My pains are otherwise: upclosing cramps
And stiffened tendons from this country's damps,
Where Panthera was never commandant.—
The Fates sent him by way of the Levant.

He had been blithe in his young manhood's time,
And as centurion carried well his prime.
In Ethiop, Araby, climes fair and fell,
He had seen service and had borne him well.
Nought shook him then: he was serene as brave;
Yet later knew some shocks, and would grow grave
When pondering them; shocks less of corporal kind
Than phantom-like, that disarranged his mind;
And it was in the way of warning me
(By much his junior) against levity
That he recounted them; and one in chief
Panthera loved to set in bold relief.

This was a tragedy of his Eastern days,
Personal in touch—though I have sometimes thought
That touch a possible delusion—wrought
Of half-conviction carried to a craze—
His mind at last being stressed by ails and age:—
Yet his good faith thereon I well could wage.

I had said it long had been a wish with me
That I might leave a scion—some small tree
As channel for my sap, if not my name—
Ay, offspring even of no legitimate claim,
In whose advance I secretly could joy.
Thereat he warmed.
"Cancel such wishes, boy!
A son may be a comfort or a curse,
A seer, a doer, a coward, a fool; yea, worse—
A criminal. . . . That I could testify!" . . .
"Panthera has no guilty son!" cried I
All unbelieving. "Friend, you do not know,"
He darkly dropt: "True, I've none now to show,
For *the law took him.* Ay, in sooth, Jove shaped it so!"

"This noon is not unlike," he again began,
"The noon these pricking memories print on me—
Yea, that day, when the sun grew copper-red,
And I served in Judæa . . . 'Twas a date
Of rest for arms. The *Pax Romana* ruled,
To the chagrin of frontier legionaries!
Palestine was annexed—though sullen yet,—
I, being in age some two-score years and ten,
And having the garrison in Jerusalem
Part in my hands as acting officer
Under the Governor. A tedious time
I found it, of routine, amid a folk
Restless, contentless, and irascible.—
Quelling some riot, sentrying court and hall,
Sending men forth on public meeting-days
To maintain order, were my duties there.

"Then came a morn in spring, and the cheerful sun
Whitened the city and the hills around,
And every mountain-road that clambered them,
Tincturing the greyness of the olives warm,
And the rank cacti round the valley's sides.
The day was one whereon death-penalties
Were put in force, and here and there were set
The soldiery for order, as I said,
Since one of the condemned had raised some heat,
And crowds surged passionately to see him slain.
I, mounted on a Cappadocian horse,
With some half-company of auxiliaries,
Had captained the procession through the streets
When it came streaming from the judgment-hall
After the verdicts of the Governor.
It drew to the great gate of the northern way
That bears towards Damascus; and to a knoll
Upon the common, just beyond the walls—
Whence could be swept a wide horizon round
Over the housetops to the remotest heights.
Here was the public execution-ground
For city crimes, called then and doubtless now
Golgotha, Cranion, or Calvaria.

"The usual dooms were duly meted out;
Some three or four were stript, transfixed, and nailed,

And no great stir occurred. A day of wont
It was to me, so far, and would have slid
Clean from my memory at its squalid close
But for an incident that followed these.

"Among the tag-rag rabble of either sex
That hung around the wretches as they writhed,
Till thrust back by our spears, one held my eye—
A weeping woman, whose strained countenance,
Sharpened against a looming livid cloud,
Was mocked by the crude rays of afternoon—
The mother of one of those who suffered there
I had heard her called when spoken roughly to
By my ranged men for pressing forward so.
It stole upon me hers was a face I knew;
Yet when, or how, I had known it, for a while
Eluded me. And then at once it came.

"Some thirty years or more before that noon
I was sub-captain of a company
Drawn from the legion of Calabria,
That marched up from Judæa north to Tyre.
We had pierced the old flat country of Jezreel,
The great Esdraelon Plain and fighting-floor
Of Jew with Canaanite, and with the host
Of Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, met
While crossing there to strike the Assyrian pride.
We left behind Gilboa; passed by Nain;
Till bulging Tabor rose, embossed to the top
With arbute, terabinth, and locust growths.

"Encumbering me were sundry sick, so fallen
Through drinking from a swamp beside the way;
But we pressed on, till, bearing over a ridge,
We dipt into a world of pleasantness—
A vale, the fairest I had gazed upon—
Which lapped a village on its furthest slopes
Called Nazareth, brimmed round by uplands nigh.
In the midst thereof a fountain bubbled, where,
Lime-dry from marching, our glad halt we made
To rest our sick ones, and refresh us all.

"Here a day onward, towards the eventide,
Our men were piping to a Pyrrhic dance

Trod by their comrades, when the young women came
To fill their pitchers, as their custom was.
I proffered help to one—a slim girl, coy
Even as a fawn, meek, and as innocent.
Her long blue gown, the string of silver coins
That hung down by her banded beautiful hair,
Symboled in full immaculate modesty.

"Well, I was young, and hot, and readily stirred
To quick desire. 'Twas tedious timing out
The convalescence of the soldiery;
And I beguiled the long and empty days
By blissful yieldance to her sweet allure,
Who had no arts, but what out-arted all,
The tremulous tender charm of trustfulness.
We met, and met, and under the winking stars
That passed which peoples earth—true union, yea,
To the pure eye of her simplicity.

"Meanwhile the sick found health; and we pricked on.
I made her no rash promise of return,
As some do use; I was sincere in that;
I said we sundered never to meet again—
And yet I spoke untruth unknowingly!—
For meet again we did. Now, guess you aught?
The weeping mother on Calvaria
Was she I had known—albeit that time and tears
Had wasted rudely her once flowerlike form,
And her soft eyes, now swollen with sorrowing.

"Though I betrayed some qualms, she marked me not;
And I was scarce of mood to comrade her
And close the silence of so wide a time
To claim a malefactor as my son—
(For so I guessed him). And inquiry made
Brought rumour how at Nazareth long before
An old man wedded her for pity's sake
On finding she had grown pregnant, none knew how,
Cared for her child, and loved her till he died.

"Well; there it ended; save that then I learnt
That he—the man whose ardent blood was mine—
Had waked sedition long among the Jews,

And hurled insulting parlance at their god,
Whose temple bulked upon the adjoining hill,
Vowing that he would raze it, that himself
Was god as great as he whom they adored,
And by descent, moreover, was their king;
With sundry other incitements to misrule.

"The impalements done, and done the soldiers' game
Of raffling for the clothes, a legionary,
Longinus, pierced the young man with his lance
At signs from me, moved by his agonies
Through naysaying the drug they had offered him.
It brought the end. And when he had breathed his last
The woman went. I saw her never again. . . .
Now glares my moody meaning on you, friend?—
That when you talk of offspring as sheer joy
So trustingly, you blink contingencies.
Fors Fortuna! He who goes fathering
Gives frightful hostages to hazardry!"

Thus Panthera's tale. 'Twas one he seldom told,
But yet it got abroad. He would unfold,
At other times, a story of less gloom,
Though his was not a heart where jests had room.
He would regret discovery of the truth
Was made too late to influence to ruth
The Procurator who had condemned his son—
Or rather him so deemed. For there was none
To prove that Panthera erred not: and indeed,
When vagueness of identity I would plead,
Panther himself would sometimes own as much—
Yet lothly. But, assuming fact was such,
That the said woman did not recognize
Her lover's face, is matter for surprise.
However, there's his tale, fantasy or otherwise.

Thereafter shone not men of Panthera's kind:
The indolent heads at home were ill-inclined
To press campaigning that would hoist the star
Of their lieutenants valorous afar.
Jealousies kept him irked abroad, controlled
And stinted by an Empire no more bold.

Yet in some actions southward he had share—
In Mauretania and Numidia; there
With eagle eye, and sword and steed and spur,
Quelling uprisings promptly. Some small stir
In Parthia next engaged him, until maimed,
As I have said; and cynic Time proclaimed
His noble spirit broken. What a waste
Of such a Roman!—one in youth-time graced
With indescribable charm, so I have heard,
Yea, magnetism impossible to word
When faltering as I saw him. What a fame,
O Son of Saturn, had adorned his name,
Might the Three so have urged Thee!—Hour by hour
His own disorders hampered Panthera's power
To brood upon the fate of those he had known,
Even of that one he always called his own—
Either in morbid dream or memory. . . .
He died at no great age, untroublously,
An exit rare for ardent soldiers such as he.

THE UNBORN

I ROSE at night, and visited
The Cave of the Unborn:
And crowding shapes surrounded me
For tidings of the life to be,
Who long had prayed the silent Head
To haste its advent morn.

Their eyes were lit with artless trust,
Hope thrilled their every tone;
"A scene the loveliest, is it not?
A pure delight, a beauty-spot
Where all is gentle, true and just,
And darkness is unknown?"

My heart was anguished for their sake,
I could not frame a word;
And they descried my sunken face,
And seemed to read therein, and trace

The news that pity would not break,
Nor truth leave unaverred.

And as I silently retired
I turned and watched them still,
And they came helter-skelter out,
Driven forward like a rabble rout
Into the world they had so desired,
By the all-immanent Will.

THE MAN HE KILLED

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because—
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like—just as I—
Was out of work—had sold his traps—
No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."

1902.

GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

(A MEMORY OF CHRISTIANA C——)

WHERE Blackmoor was, the road that led
To Bath, she could not show,
Nor point the sky that overspread
Towns ten miles off or so.

But that Calcutta stood this way,
Cape Horn there figured fell,
That here was Boston, here Bombay,
She could declare full well.

Less known to her the track athwart
Froom Mead or Yell'ham Wood
Than how to make some Austral port
In seas of surly mood.

She saw the glint of Guinea's shore
Behind the plum-tree nigh,
Heard old unruly Biscay's roar
In the weir's purl hard by. . . .

"My son's a sailor, and he knows
All seas and many lands,
And when he's home he points and shows
Each country where it stands.

"He's now just there—by Gib's high rock—
And when he gets, you see,
To Portsmouth here, behind the clock,
Then he'll come back to me!"

ONE RALPH BLOSSOM SOLILOQUIZES

("It being deposed that vij women who were mayds before he knew them have been brought upon the towne [rates?] by the fornicacions of one Ralph Blossom, Mr. Maior inquired why he should not contribute xiv pence weekly toward their mayntenance. But it being shewn that the sayd R. B. was dying of a purple feaver, no order was made."—*Budmouth Borough Minutes*: 16—.)

WHEN I am in hell or some such place,
A-groaning over my sorry case,
What will those seven women say to me
Who, when I coaxed them, answered "Aye" to me?

"I did not understand your sign!"
Will be the words of Caroline;
While Jane will cry, "If I'd had proof of you,
I should have learnt to hold aloof of you!"

"I won't reproach: it was to be!"
Will dryly murmur Cicely;
And Rosa: "I feel no hostility,
For I must own I lent facility."

Lizzy says: "Sharp was my regret,
And sometimes it is now! But yet
I joy that, though it brought notoriousness,
I knew Love once and all its gloriousness!"

Says Patience: "Why are we apart?
Small harm did you, my poor Sweet Heart!
A manchild born, now tall and beautiful,
Was worth the ache of days undutiful."

And Anne cries: "O the time was fair,
So wherefore should you burn down there?
There is a deed under the sun, my Love,
And that was ours. What's done is done, my Love.
These trumpets here in Heaven are dumb to me
With you away. Dear, come, O come to me!"

THE NOBLE LADY'S TALE

(*circa* 1790)

I

"We moved with pensive paces,
I and he,
And bent our faded faces
Wistfully,
For something troubled him, and troubled me.

"The lanthorn feebly lightened
Our grey hall,
Where ancient brands had brightened
Hearth and wall,
And shapes long vanished whither vanish all.

"'O why, Love, nightly, daily,'
I had said,
'Dost sigh, and smile so palely,
As if shed
Were all Life's blossoms, all its dear things dead?'

"'Since silence sets thee grieving,'
He replied,
'And I abhor deceiving
One so tried,
Why, Love, I'll speak, ere time us twain divide.

"He held me, I remember,
Just as when
Our life was June—(September
It was then);
And we walked on, until he spoke again:

"'Susie, an Irish mummer,
Loud-acclaimed
Through the gay London summer,
Was I; named
A master in my art, who would be famed.

"'But lo, there beamed before me
Lady Su;
God's altar-vow she swore me
When none knew,
And for her sake I bade the sock adieu.

"'My Lord your father's pardon
Thus I won:
He let his heart unharden
Towards his son,
And honourably condoned what we had done;

"'But said—recall you, dearest?—
As for Su,
I'd see her—ay, though nearest
Me unto—
Sooner entombed than in a stage purlieu!

"'Just so.—And here he housed us,
In this nook,
Where Love like balm has drowsed us:
Robin, rook,
Our chief familiars, next to string and book.

"'Our days here, peace-enshrouded,
Followed strange
The old stage-joyance, crowded,
Rich in range;
But never did my soul desire a change,

"'Till now, when far uncertain
Lips of yore
Call, call me to the curtain,
There once more,
But *once*, to tread the boards I trod before.

"'A night—the last and single
Ere I die—
To face the lights, to mingle
As did I
Once in the game, and rivet every eye!'

"Such was his wish. He feared it,
Feared it though

Rare memories so endeared it.
I, also,
Feared it still more; its outcome who could know?

"'Alas, my Love,' said I then,
'Since it be
A wish so mastering, why, then,
E'en go ye!—
Despite your pledge to father and to me . .

"'Twas fixed; no more was spoken
Thereupon;
Our silences were broken
Only on
The petty items of his needs while gone.

"Farewell he bade me, pleading
That it meant
So little, thus conceding
To his bent;
And then, as one constrained to go, he went.

"Thwart thoughts I let deride me,
As, 'twere vain
To hope him back beside me
Ever again:
Could one plunge make a waxing passion wane?

"I thought, 'Some wild stage-woman,
Honour-wrecked . . .'
But no: it was inhuman
To suspect;
Though little cheer could my lone heart affect!

II

"Yet came it, to my gladness,
That, as vowed,
He did return.—But sadness
Swiftly cowed
The joy with which my greeting was endowed.

"Some woe was there. Estrangement
Marked his mind.
Each welcome-warm arrangement
I had designed
Touched him no more than deeds of careless kind.

"'I—*failed*!' escaped him glumly.
'—I went on
In my old part. But dumbly—
Memory gone—
Advancing, I sank sick; my vision drawn

"'To something drear, distressing
As the knell
Of all hopes worth possessing!' . . .
—What befell
Seemed linked with me, but how I could not tell.

"Hours passed; till I implored him,
As he knew
How faith and frankness toward him
Ruled me through,
To say what ill I had done, and could undo.

"'*Faith—frankness.* Ah! Heaven save such!'
Murmured he,
'They are wedded wealth! *I* gave such
Liberally,
But you, Dear, not. For you suspected me.'

"I was about beseeching
In hurt haste
More meaning, when he, reaching
To my waist,
Led me to pace the hall as once we paced.

"'I never meant to draw you
To own all,'
Declared he, 'But—I *saw* you—
By the wall,
Half-hid. And that was why I failed withal!

"'Where? when?' said I—'Why, nigh me,
At the play

That night. That you should spy me,
Doubt my fay,
And follow, furtive, took my heart away!'

"That I had never been there,
But had gone
To my locked room—unseen there,
Curtains drawn,
Long days abiding—told I, wonder-wan.

"'Nay, 'twas your form and vesture,
Cloak and gown,
Your hooded features—gesture
Half in frown,
That faced me, pale,' he urged, 'that night in town.

"'And when, outside, I handed
To her chair
(As courtesy demanded
Of me there)
The leading lady, you peeped from the stair.

"Straight pleaded I: 'Forsooth, Love,
Had I gone,
I must have been in truth, Love,
Mad to don
Such well-known raiment.' But he still went on

"That he was not mistaken
Nor misled.—
I felt like one forsaken,
Wished me dead,
That he could think thus of the wife he had wed!

"His going seemed to waste him
Like a curse,
To wreck what once had graced him;
And, averse
To my approach, he mused, and moped, and worse.

"Till, what no words effected
Thought achieved:

It was my wraith—projected,
He conceived,
Thither, by my tense brain at home aggrieved.

"Thereon his credence centred
Till he died;
And, no more tempted, entered
Sanctified,
The little vault with room for one beside."

III

Thus far the lady's story.—
Now she, too,
Reclines within that hoary
Last dark mew
In Mellstock Quire with him she loved so true.

A yellowing marble, placed there
Tablet-wise,
And two joined hearts enchased there
Meet the eyes;
And reading their twin names we moralize:

Did she, we wonder, follow
Jealously?
And were those protests hollow?—
Or saw he
Some semblant dame? Or can wraiths really be?

Were it she went, her honour,
All may hold,
Pressed truth at last upon her
Till she told—
(Him only—others as these lines unfold.)

Riddle death-sealed for ever,
Let it rest! . . .
One's heart could blame her never
If one guessed
That go she did. She knew her actor best.

UNREALIZED

Down comes the winter rain—
Spoils my hat and bow—
Runs into the poll of me;
But mother won't know.

We've been out and caught a cold,
Knee-deep in snow;
Such a lucky thing it is
That mother won't know!

Rosy lost herself last night—
Couldn't tell where to go.
Yes—it rather frightened her,
But mother didn't know.

Somebody made Willy drunk
At the Christmas show:
O 'twas fun! It's well for him
That mother won't know!

Howsoever wild we are,
Late at school or slow,
Mother won't be cross with us,
Mother won't know.

How we cried the day she died!
Neighbours whispering low . .
But we now do what we will—
Mother won't know.

WAGTAIL AND BABY

A baby watched a ford, whereto
A wagtail came for drinking;
A blaring bull went wading through,
The wagtail showed no shrinking.

A stallion splashed his way across,
    The birdie nearly sinking;
He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,
    And held his own unblinking.

Next saw the baby round the spot
    A mongrel slowly slinking;
The wagtail gazed, but faltered not
    In dip and sip and prinking.

A perfect gentleman then neared;
    The wagtail, in a winking,
With terror rose and disappeared;
    The baby fell a-thinking.

ABERDEEN

(April: 1905)

"And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times."—
Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

I LOOKED and thought, "All is too gray and cold
To wake my place-enthusiasms of old!"
Till a voice passed: "Behind that granite mien
Lurks the imposing beauty of a Queen."
I looked anew; and saw the radiant form
Of Her who soothes in stress, who steers in storm,
On the grave influence of whose eyes sublime
Men count for the stability of the time.

GEORGE MEREDITH

(1828–1909)

FORTY years back, when much had place
That since has perished out of mind,
I heard that voice and saw that face.

He spoke as one afoot will wind
A morning horn ere men awake;
His note was trenchant, turning kind.

He was of those whose wit can shake
And riddle to the very core
The counterfeits that Time will break. .

Of late, when we two met once more,
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.

So that, when now all tongues declare
His shape unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there.

No matter. Further and further still
Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
His words wing on—as live words will.

May 1909.

YELL'HAM-WOOD'S STORY

COOMB-FIRTREES say that Life is a moan,
And Clyffe-hill Clump says "Yea!"
But Yell'ham says a thing of its own:
It's not "Gray, gray
Is Life alway!"
That Yell'ham says,
Nor that Life is for ends unknown.

It says that Life would signify
A thwarted purposing:
That we come to live, and are called to die.
Yes, that's the thing
In fall, in spring,
That Yell'ham says:—
"Life offers—to deny!"

1902.

A YOUNG MAN'S EPIGRAM ON EXISTENCE

A SENSELESS school, where we must give
Our lives that we may learn to live!
A dolt is he who memorizes
Lessons that leave no time for prizes.

16 W. P. V., 1866.

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

LYRICS AND REVERIES

LYRICS AND REVERIES

IN FRONT OF THE LANDSCAPE

PLUNGING and labouring on in a tide of visions,
Dolorous and dear,
Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters
Stretching around,
Through whose eddies there glimmered the customed landscape
Yonder and near

Blotted to feeble mist. And the coomb and the upland
Coppice-crowned,
Ancient chalk-pit, milestone, rills in the grass-flat
Stroked by the light,
Seemed but a ghost-like gauze, and no substantial
Meadow or mound.

What were the infinite spectacles featuring foremost
Under my sight,
Hindering me to discern my paced advancement
Lengthening to miles ;
What were the re-creations killing the daytime
As by the night ?

O they were speechful faces, gazing insistent,
Some as with smiles,
Some as with slow-born tears that brinily trundled
Over the wrecked
Cheeks that were fair in their flush-time, ash now with anguish,
Harrowed by wiles.

Yes, I could see them, feel them, hear them, address them—
Halo-bedecked—
And, alas, onwards, shaken by fierce unreason,
Rigid in hate,
Smitten by years-long wryness born of misprision,
Dreaded, suspect.

Then there would breast me shining sights, sweet seasons
Further in date;
Instruments of strings with the tenderest passion
Vibrant, beside
Lamps long extinguished, robes, cheeks, eyes with the earth's crust
Now corporate.

Also there rose a headland of hoary aspect
Gnawed by the tide,
Frilled by the nimb of the morning as two friends stood there
Guilelessly glad—
Wherefore they knew not—touched by the fringe of an ecstasy
Scantly descried.

Later images too did the day unfurl me,
Shadowed and sad,
Clay cadavers of those who had shared in the dramas,
Laid now at ease,
Passions all spent, chiefest the one of the broad brow
Sepulture-clad.

So did beset me scenes, miscalled of the bygone,
Over the leaze,
Past the clump, and down to where lay the beheld ones;
—Yea, as the rhyme
Sung by the sea-swell, so in their pleading dumbness
Captured me these.

For, their lost revisiting manifestations
In their live time
Much had I slighted, caring not for their purport,
Seeing behind
Things more coveted, reckoned the better worth calling
Sweet, sad, sublime.

Thus do they now show hourly before the intenser
    Stare of the mind
As they were ghosts avenging their slights by my bypast
    Body-borne eyes,
Show, too, with fuller translation than rested upon them
    As living kind.

Hence wag the tongues of the passing people, saying
    In their surmise,
"Ah—whose is this dull form that perambulates, seeing nought
    Round him that looms
Whithersoever his footsteps turn in his farings,
    Save a few tombs?"

CHANNEL FIRING

THAT night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumb,
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;
It's gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christés sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening. . . .

"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need)."

So down we lay again. "I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,"
Said one, "than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!".

And many a skeleton shook his head.
"Instead of preaching forty year,"
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
"I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer."

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

April 1914.

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN

(*Lines on the loss of the "Titanic"*)

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?"

VI

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate
For her—so gaily great—
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

THE GHOST OF THE PAST

WE two kept house, the Past and I,
The Past and I;
Through all my tasks it hovered nigh,
Leaving me never alone.
It was a spectral housekeeping
Where fell no jarring tone,
As strange, as still a housekeeping
As ever has been known.

As daily I went up the stair
And down the stair,
I did not mind the Bygone there—
The Present once to me;
Its moving meek companionship
I wished might ever be,
There was in that companionship
Something of ecstasy.

It dwelt with me just as it was,
Just as it was
When first its prospects gave me pause
In wayward wanderings,
Before the years had torn old troths
As they tear all sweet things,
Before gaunt griefs had torn old troths
And dulled old rapturings.

And then its form began to fade,
Began to fade,
Its gentle echoes faintlier played
At eves upon my ear
Than when the autumn's look embrowned
The lonely chambers here,
When autumn's settling shades embrowned
Nooks that it haunted near.

And so with time my vision less,
Yea, less and less
Makes of that Past my housemistress,
It dwindles in my eye;

It looms a far-off skeleton
And not a comrade nigh,
A fitful far-off skeleton
Dimming as days draw by.

AFTER THE VISIT

(To F. E. D.)

COME again to the place
Where your presence was as a leaf that skims
Down a drouthy way whose ascent bedims
The bloom on the farer's face.

Come again, with the feet
That were light on the green as a thistledown ball,
And those mute ministrations to one and to all
Beyond a man's saying sweet.

Until then the faint scent
Of the bordering flowers swam unheeded away,
And I marked not the charm in the changes of day
As the cloud-colours came and went.

Through the dark corridors
Your walk was so soundless I did not know
Your form from a phantom's of long ago
Said to pass on the ancient floors,

Till you drew from the shade,
And I saw the large luminous living eyes
Regard me in fixed inquiring-wise
As those of a soul that weighed,

Scarce consciously,
The eternal question of what Life was,
And why we were there, and by whose strange laws
That which mattered most could not be.

TO MEET, OR OTHERWISE

WHETHER to sally and see thee, girl of my dreams,
Or whether to stay
And see thee not! How vast the difference seems
Of Yea from Nay
Just now. Yet this same sun will slant its beams
At no far day
On our two mounds, and then what will the difference weigh!

Yet I will see thee, maiden dear, and make
The most I can
Of what remains to us amid this brake
Cimmerian
Through which we grope, and from whose thorns we ache,
While still we scan
Round our frail faltering progress for some path or plan.

By briefest meeting something sure is won;
It will have been:
Nor God nor Demon can undo the done,
Unsight the seen,
Make muted music be as unbegun,
Though things terrene
Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.

So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
From times remote
Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
Supply one note,
Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
Somewhere afloat
Amid the spheres, as part of sick Life's antidote.

THE DIFFERENCE

I

SINKING down by the gate I discern the thin moon,
And a blackbird tries over old airs in the pine,
But the moon is a sorry one, sad the bird's tune,
For this spot is unknown to that Heartmate of mine.

II

Did my Heartmate but haunt here at times such as now,
The song would be joyous and cheerful the moon;
But she will see never this gate, path, or bough,
Nor I find a joy in the scene or the tune.

THE SUN ON THE BOOKCASE

(*Student's Love-song*: 1870)

ONCE more the cauldron of the sun
Smears the bookcase with winy red,
And here my page is, and there my bed,
And the apple-tree shadows travel along.
Soon their intangible track will be run,
        And dusk grow strong
        And they have fled.

Yes: now the boiling ball is gone,
And I have wasted another day. . . .
But wasted—*wasted*, do I say?
Is it a waste to have imaged one
Beyond the hills there, who, anon,
        My great deeds done
        Will be mine alway?

"WHEN I SET OUT FOR LYONNESSE'

(1870)

WHEN I set out for Lyonnesse,
    A hundred miles away,
    The rime was on the spray,
And starlight lit my lonesomeness
When I set out for Lyonnesse
    A hundred miles away.

What would bechance at Lyonnesse
    While I should sojourn there
    No prophet durst declare,

Nor did the wisest wizard guess
What would bechance at Lyonnesse
While I should sojourn there.

When I came back from Lyonnesse
With magic in my eyes,
All marked with mute surmise
My radiance rare and fathomless,
When I came back from Lyonnesse
With magic in my eyes.

A THUNDERSTORM IN TOWN

(*A Reminiscence*: 1893)

SHE wore a new "terra-cotta" dress,
And we stayed, because of the pelting storm,
Within the hansom's dry recess,
Though the horse had stopped; yea, motionless
We sat on, snug and warm.

Then the downpour ceased, to my sharp sad pain,
And the glass that had screened our forms before
Flew up, and out she sprang to her door:
I should have kissed her if the rain
Had lasted a minute more.

THE TORN LETTER

I

I TORE your letter into strips
No bigger than the airy feathers,
That ducks preen out in changing weathers
Upon the shifting ripple-tips.

II

In darkness on my bed alone
I seemed to see you in a vision,
And hear you say: "Why this derision
Of one drawn to you, though unknown?"

III

Yes, eve's quick mood had run its course,
The night had cooled my hasty madness;
I suffered a regretful sadness
Which deepened into real remorse.

IV

I thought what pensive patient days
A soul must know of grain so tender,
How much of good must grace the sender
Of such sweet words in such bright phrase.

V

Uprising then, as things unpriced
I sought each fragment, patched and mended;
The midnight whitened ere I had ended
And gathered words I had sacrificed.

VI

But some, alas, of those I threw
Were past my search, destroyed for ever:
They were your name and place; and never
Did I regain those clues to you.

VII

I learnt I had missed, by rash unheed,
My track; that, so the Will decided,
In life, death, we should be divided,
And at the sense I ached indeed.

VIII

That ache for you, born long ago,
Throbs on: I never could outgrow it.
What a revenge, did you but know it!
But that, thank God, you do not know.

BEYOND THE LAST LAMP

(*Near Tooting Common*)

I

While rain, with eve in partnership,
Descended darkly, drip, drip, drip,
Beyond the last lone lamp I passed
    Walking slowly, whispering sadly,
    Two linked loiterers, wan, downcast:
Some heavy thought constrained each face,
And blinded them to time and place.

II

The pair seemed lovers, yet absorbed
In mental scenes no longer orbed
By love's young rays. Each countenance
    As it slowly, as it sadly
    Caught the lamplight's yellow glance,
Held in suspense a misery
At things which had been or might be.

III

When I retrod that watery way
Some hours beyond the droop of day,
Still I found pacing there the twain
    Just as slowly, just as sadly,
    Heedless of the night and rain.
One could but wonder who they were,
And what wild woe detained them there.

IV

Though thirty years of blur and blot
Have slid since I beheld that spot,
And saw in curious converse there
    Moving slowly, moving sadly
    That mysterious tragic pair,
Its olden look may linger on—
All but the couple; they have gone.

V

Whither? Who knows, indeed. . . . And yet
To me, when nights are weird and wet,
Without those comrades there at tryst
Creeping slowly, creeping sadly,
That lone lane does not exist.
There they seem brooding on their pain,
And will, while such a lane remain.

THE FACE AT THE CASEMENT

If ever joy leave
An abiding sting of sorrow,
So befell it on the morrow
Of that May eve. . . .

The travelled sun dropped
To the north-west, low and lower,
The pony's trot grew slower,
Until we stopped.

"This cosy house just by
I must call at for a minute,
A sick man lies within it
Who soon will die.

"He wished to—marry me,
So I am bound, when I drive near him,
To inquire, if but to cheer him,
How he may be."

A message was sent in,
And wordlessly we waited,
Till some one came and stated
The bulletin.

And that the sufferer said,
For her call no words could thank her;
As his angel he must rank her
Till life's spark fled.

Slowly we drove away,
When I turned my head, although not
Called to: why I turned I know not
Even to this day:

And lo, there in my view
Pressed against an upper lattice
Was a white face, gazing at us
As we withdrew.

And well did I divine
It to be the man's there dying,
Who but lately had been sighing
For her pledged mine.

Then I deigned a deed of hell:
It was done before I knew it;
What devil made me do it
I cannot tell!

Yes, while he gazed above,
I put my arm about her
That he might see, nor doubt her
My plighted Love.

The pale face vanished quick,
As if blasted, from the casement,
And my shame and self-abasement
Began their prick.

And they prick on, ceaselessly,
For that stab in Love's fierce fashion
Which, unfired by lover's passion,
Was foreign to me.

She smiled at my caress,
But why came the soft embowment
Of her shoulder at that moment
She did not guess.

Long long years has he lain
In thy garth, O sad Saint Cleather:
What tears there, bared to weather,
Will cleanse that stain!

Love is long-suffering, brave,
Sweet, prompt, precious as a jewel;
But O, too, Love is cruel,
Cruel as the grave.

LOST LOVE

I PLAY my sweet old airs—
The airs he knew
When our love was true—
But he does not balk
His determined walk,
And passes up the stairs.

I sing my songs once more,
And presently hear
His footstep near
As if it would stay;
But he goes his way,
And shuts a distant door.

So I wait for another morn,
And another night
In this soul-sick blight;
And I wonder much
As I sit, why such
A woman as I was born!

"MY SPIRIT WILL NOT HAUNT THE MOUND"

MY spirit will not haunt the mound
Above my breast,
But travel, memory-possessed,
To where my tremulous being found
Life largest, best.

My phantom-footed shape will go
When nightfall grays

Hither and thither along the ways
I and another used to know
    In backward days.

And there you'll find me, if a jot
    You still should care
For me, and for my curious air;
If otherwise, then I shall not,
    For you, be there.

WESSEX HEIGHTS

(1896)

THERE are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a kindly hand
For thinking, dreaming, dying on, and at crises when I stand,
Say, on Ingpen Beacon eastward, or on Wylls-Neck westwardly,
I seem where I was before my birth, and after death may be.

In the lowlands I have no comrade, not even the lone man's friend—
Her who suffereth long and is kind; accepts what he is too weak to mend:
Down there they are dubious and askance; there nobody thinks as I,
But mind-chains do not clank where one's next neighbour is the sky.

In the towns I am tracked by phantoms having weird detective ways—
Shadows of beings who fellowed with myself of earlier days:
They hang about at places, and they say harsh heavy things—
Men with a wintry sneer, and women with tart disparagings.

Down there I seem to be false to myself, my simple self that was,
And is not now, and I see him watching, wondering what crass cause
Can have merged him into such a strange continuator as this,
Who yet has something in common with himself, my chrysalis.

I cannot go to the great grey Plain; there's a figure against the moon,
Nobody sees it but I, and it makes my breast beat out of tune;
I cannot go to the tall-spired town, being barred by the forms now passed
For everybody but me, in whose long vision they stand there fast.

There's a ghost at Yell'ham Bottom chiding loud at the fall of the night,
There's a ghost in Froom-side Vale, thin lipped and vague, in a shroud of white,
There is one in the railway train whenever I do not want it near,
I see its profile against the pane, saying what I would not hear.

As for one rare fair woman, I am now but a thought of hers,
I enter her mind and another thought succeeds me that she prefers;
Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself even did not know;
Well, time cures hearts of tenderness, and now I can let her go.

So I am found on Ingpen Beacon, or on Wylls-Neck to the west,
Or else on homely Bulbarrow, or little Pilsdon Crest,
Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have walked with me,
And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some liberty.

IN DEATH DIVIDED

I

I SHALL rot here, with those whom in their day
You never knew,
And alien ones who, ere they chilled to clay,
Met not my view,
Will in your distant grave-place ever neighbour you.

II

No shade of pinnacle or tree or tower,
While earth endures,

Will fall on my mound and within the hour
Steal on to yours;
One robin never haunt our two green covertures.

III

Some organ may resound on Sunday noons
By where you lie,
Some other thrill the panes with other tunes
Where moulder I;
No selfsame chords compose our common lullaby.

IV

The simply-cut memorial at my head
Perhaps may take
A rustic form, and that above your bed
A stately make;
No linking symbol show thereon for our tale's sake.

V

And in the monotonous moils of strained, hard-run
Humanity,
The eternal tie which binds us twain in one
No eye will see
Stretching across the miles that sever you from me.

THE PLACE ON THE MAP

I

I LOOK upon the map that hangs by me—
Its shires and towns and rivers lined in varnished artistry—
And I mark a jutting height
Coloured purple, with a margin of blue sea.

II

—'Twas a day of latter summer, hot and dry;
Ay, even the waves seemed drying as we walked on, she and I,
By this spot where, calmly quite,
She unfolded what would happen by and by.

III

This hanging map depicts the coast and place,
And re-creates therewith our unforeboded troublous case
All distinctly to my sight,
And her tension, and the aspect of her face.

IV

Weeks and weeks we had loved beneath that blazing blue,
Which had lost the art of raining, as her eyes to-day had too,
While she told what, as by sleight,
Shot our firmament with rays of ruddy hue.

V

For the wonder and the wormwood of the whole
Was that what in realms of reason would have joyed our double soul
Wore a torrid tragic light
Under order-keeping's rigorous control.

VI

So, the map revives her words, the spot, the time,
And the thing we found we had to face before the next year's prime;
The charted coast stares bright,
And its episode comes back in pantomime.

THE SCHRECKHORN

(*With thoughts of Leslie Stephen*)

(June 1897)

Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim;
Now that its spare and desolate figure gleams
Upon my nearing vision, less it seems
A looming Alp-height than a guise of him
Who scaled its horn with ventured life and limb,
Drawn on by vague imaginings, maybe,
Of semblance to his personality
In its quaint glooms, keen lights, and rugged trim.

At his last change, when Life's dull coils unwind,
Will he, in old love, hitherward escape,
And the eternal essence of his mind
Enter this silent adamantine shape,
And his low voicing haunt its slipping snows
When dawn that calls the climber dyes them rose?

A SINGER ASLEEP

(*Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 1837–1909)

I

In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,
The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be
Pillowed eternally.

II

—It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

III

O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavements lay
Glassing the sunshine into my bent eyes,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise,—

IV

The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel who
Blew them not naïvely, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

V

I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

VI

—His singing-mistress verily was no other
Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep
Into the rambling world-encircling deep
Which hides her where none sees.

VII

And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,
And mariners wonder as they traverse near,
Unknowing of her and him.

VIII

One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
"O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very orts are love incarnadine?"
And her smile back: "Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine." . . .

IX

So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains—
Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes—
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

BONCHURCH, 1910.

A PLAINT TO MAN

When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
And gained percipience as you grew,
And fleshed you fair out of shapeless slime,

Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
The unhappy need of creating me—
A form like your own—for praying to?

My virtue, power, utility,
Within my maker must all abide,
Since none in myself can ever be,

One thin as a phasm on a lantern-slide
Shown forth in the dark upon some dim sheet,
And by none but its showman vivified.

"Such a forced device," you may say, "is meet
For easing a loaded heart at whiles:
Man needs to conceive of a mercy-seat

Somewhere above the gloomy aisles
Of this wailful world, or he could not bear
The irk no local hope beguiles."

—But since I was framed in your first despair
The doing without me has had no play
In the minds of men when shadows scare;

And now that I dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay,

And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown.

1909–10.

GOD'S FUNERAL

I

I SAW a slowly-stepping train—
Lined on the brows, scoop-eyed and bent and hoar—
Following in files across a twilit plain
A strange and mystic form the foremost bore.

II

And by contagious throbs of thought
Or latent knowledge that within me lay
And had already stirred me, I was wrought
To consciousness of sorrow even as they.

III

The fore-borne shape, to my blurred eyes,
At first seemed man-like, and anon to change
To an amorphous cloud of marvellous size,
At times endowed with wings of glorious range.

IV

And this phantasmal variousness
Ever possessed it as they drew along:
Yet throughout all it symboled none the less
Potency vast and loving-kindness strong.

V

Almost before I knew I bent
Towards the moving columns without a word;
They, growing in bulk and numbers as they went,
Struck out sick thoughts that could be overheard:-

VI

"O man-projected Figure, of late
Imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?
Whence came it we were tempted to create
One whom we can no longer keep alive?

VII

"Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.

VIII

"And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we deem,
And what we had imagined we believed.

IX

"Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.

X

"So, toward our myth's oblivion,
Darkling, and languid-lipped, we creep and grope
Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon,
Whose Zion was a still abiding hope.

XI

"How sweet it was in years far hied
To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
To lie down liegely at the eventide
And feel a blest assurance he was there!

XII

"And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?" . . .

XIII

Some in the background then I saw,
Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,

Who chimed: "This is a counterfeit of straw,
This requiem mockery! Still he lives to us!"

XIV

I could not buoy their faith: and yet
Many I had known: with all I sympathized;
And though struck speechless, I did not forget
That what was mourned for, I, too, long had prized.

XV

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,
And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

XVI

Whereof, to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
"See you upon the horizon that small light—
Swelling somewhat?" Each mourner shook his head.

XVII

And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best. . .
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest.

1908-10.

SPECTRES THAT GRIEVE

"It is not death that harrows us," they lipped,
"The soundless cell is in itself relief,
For life is an unfenced flower, benumbed and nipped
At unawares, and at its best but brief."

The speakers, sundry phantoms of the gone,
Had risen like filmy flames of phosphor dye,
As if the palest of sheet lightnings shone
From the sward near me, as from a nether sky.

And much surprised was I that, spent and dead,
They should not, like the many, be at rest,
But stray as apparitions; hence I said,
"Why, having slipped life, hark you back distressed?"

"We are among the few death sets not free,
The hurt, misrepresented names, who come
At each year's brink, and cry to History
To do them justice, or go past them dumb.

"We are stript of rights; our shames lie unredressed,
Our deeds in full anatomy are not shown,
Our words in morsels merely are expressed
On the scriptured page, our motives blurred, unknown."

Then all these shaken slighted visitants sped
Into the vague, and left me musing there
On fames that well might instance what they had said,
Until the New-Year's dawn strode up the air.

"AH, ARE YOU DIGGING ON MY GRAVE?"

"Ah, are you digging on my grave
  My beloved one?—planting rue?"
—"No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
'It cannot hurt her now,' he said,
  'That I should not be true.'"

"Then who is digging on my grave?
  My nearest dearest kin?"
—"Ah, no: they sit and think, 'What use!
What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
  Her spirit from Death's gin.'"

"But some one digs upon my grave?
  My enemy?—prodding sly?"
—"Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
  And cares not where you lie."

"Then, who is digging on my grave?
Say—since I have not guessed!"
—"O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?"

"Ah, yes! *You* dig upon my grave . . .
Why flashed it not on me
That one true heart was left behind!
What feeling do we ever find
To equal among human kind
A dog's fidelity!"

"Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
It was your resting-place."

SELF-UNCONSCIOUS

ALONG the way
He walked that day,
Watching shapes that reveries limn,
And seldom he
Had eyes to see
The moment that encompassed him.

Bright yellowhammers
Made mirthful clamours,
And billed long straws with a bustling air,
And bearing their load
Flew up the road
That he followed, alone, without interest there.

From bank to ground
And over and round
They sidled along the adjoining hedge;

Sometimes to the gutter
Their yellow flutter
Would dip from the nearest slatestone ledge.

The smooth sea-line
With a metal shine,
And flashes of white, and a sail thereon,
He would also descry
With a half-wrapt eye
Between the projects he mused upon.

Yes, round him were these
Earth's artistries,
But specious plans that came to his call
Did most engage
His pilgrimage,
While himself he did not see at all.

Dead now as sherds
Are the yellow birds,
And all that mattered has passed away;
Yet God, the Elf,
Now shows him that self
As he was, and should have been shown, that day.

O it would have been good
Could he then have stood
At a clear-eyed distance, and conned the whole,
But now such vision
Is mere derision,
Nor soothes his body nor saves his soul.

Not much, some may
Incline to say,
To see therein, had it all been seen.
Nay! he is aware
A thing was there
That loomed with an immortal mien.

THE DISCOVERY

I WANDERED to a crude coast
    Like a ghost;
Upon the hills I saw fires—
    Funeral pyres
Seemingly—and heard breaking
Waves like distant cannonades that set the land shaking.

And so I never once guessed
    A Love-nest,
Bowered and candle-lit, lay
    In my way,
Till I found a hid hollow,
Where I burst on her my heart could not but follow.

TOLERANCE

"It is a foolish thing," said I,
"To bear with such, and pass it by;
Yet so I do, I know not why!"

And at each cross I would surmise
That if I had willed not in that wise
I might have spared me many sighs.

But now the only happiness
In looking back that I possess—
Whose lack would leave me comfortless—

Is to remember I refrained
From masteries I might have gained,
And for my tolerance was disdained;

For see, a tomb. And if it were
I had bent and broke, I should not dare
To linger in the shadows there.

BEFORE AND AFTER SUMMER

I

LOOKING forward to the spring
One puts up with anything.
On this February day
Though the winds leap down the street
Wintry scourgings seem but play,
And these later shafts of sleet
—Sharper pointed than the first—
And these later snows—the worst—
Are as a half-transparent blind
Riddled by rays from sun behind.

II

Shadows of the October pine
Reach into this room of mine:
On the pine there swings a bird;
He is shadowed with the tree.
Mutely perched he bills no word;
Blank as I am even is he.
For those happy suns are past,
Fore-discerned in winter last.
When went by their pleasure, then?
I, alas, perceived not when.

AT DAY-CLOSE IN NOVEMBER

THE ten hours' light is abating,
　　And a late bird wings across,
Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
　　Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time,
　　Float past like specks in the eye;
I set every tree in my June time,
　　And now they obscure the sky.

And the children who ramble through here
Conceive that there never has been
A time when no tall trees grew here,
A time when none will be seen.

THE YEAR'S AWAKENING

How do you know that the pilgrim track
Along the belting zodiac
Swept by the sun in his seeming rounds
Is traced by now to the Fishes' bounds
And into the Ram, when weeks of cloud
Have wrapt the sky in a clammy shroud,
And never as yet a tinct of spring
Has shown in the Earth's apparelling;
O vespering bird, how do you know,
How do you know?

How do you know, deep underground,
Hid in your bed from sight and sound,
Without a turn in temperature,
With weather life can scarce endure,
That light has won a fraction's strength,
And day put on some moments' length,
Whereof in merest rote will come,
Weeks hence, mild airs that do not numb;
O crocus root, how do you know,
How do you know?

February 1910.

UNDER THE WATERFALL

"Whenever I plunge my arm, like this,
In a basin of water, I never miss
The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day
Fetched back from its thickening shroud of gray.
Hence the only prime
And real love-rhyme

That I know by heart,
And that leaves no smart,
Is the purl of a little valley fall
About three spans wide and two spans tall
Over a table of solid rock,
And into a scoop of the self-same block;
The purl of a runlet that never ceases
In stir of kingdoms, in wars, in peaces;
With a hollow boiling voice it speaks
And has spoken since hills were turfless peaks."

"And why gives this the only prime
Idea to you of a real love-rhyme?
And why does plunging your arm in a bowl
Full of spring water, bring throbs to your soul?"
"Well, under the fall, in a crease of the stone,
Though where precisely none ever has known,
Jammed darkly, nothing to show how prized,
And by now with its smoothness opalized,
Is a drinking-glass:
For, down that pass
My lover and I
Walked under a sky
Of blue with a leaf-wove awning of green,
In the burn of August, to paint the scene,
And we placed our basket of fruit and wine
By the runlet's rim, where we sat to dine;
And when we had drunk from the glass together,
Arched by the oak-copse from the weather,
I held the vessel to rinse in the fall,
Where it slipped, and sank, and was past recall,
Though we stooped and plumbed the little abyss
With long bared arms. There the glass still is.
And, as said, if I thrust my arm below
Cold water in basin or bowl, a throe
From the past awakens a sense of that time,
And the glass we used, and the cascade's rhyme.
The basin seems the pool, and its edge
The hard smooth face of the brook-side ledge,
And the leafy pattern of china-ware
The hanging plants that were bathing there.

"By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
There lies intact that chalice of ours,
And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
Persistently sung by the fall above.
No lip has touched it since his and mine
In turns therefrom sipped lovers' wine."

POEMS OF 1912–13

Veteris vestigia flammae

THE GOING

WHY did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone
        Where I could not follow
        With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

        Never to bid good-bye,
        Or lip me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
        Unmoved, unknowing
        That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.

Why do you make me leave the house
And think for a breath it is you I see
At the end of the alley of bending boughs
Where so often at dusk you used to be;
        Till in darkening dankness
        The yawning blankness
Of the perspective sickens me!

        You were she who abode
        By those red-veined rocks far West,

You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
        And, reining nigh me,
        Would muse and eye me,
While Life unrolled us its very best.

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,
Did we not think of those days long dead,
And ere your vanishing strive to seek
That time's renewal? We might have said,
        "In this bright spring weather
        We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited."

        Well, well! All's past amend,
        Unchangeable. It must go.
I seem but a dead man held on end
To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know
        That such swift fleeing
        No soul foreseeing—
Not even I—would undo me so!

December 1912.

YOUR LAST DRIVE

HERE by the moorway you returned,
And saw the borough lights ahead
That lit your face—all undiscerned
To be in a week the face of the dead,
And you told of the charm of that haloed view
That never again would beam on you.

And on your left you passed the spot
Where eight days later you were to lie,
And be spoken of as one who was not;
Beholding it with a heedless eye
As alien from you, though under its tree
You soon would halt everlastingly.

I drove not with you. . . . Yet had I sat
At your side that eve I should not have seen

That the countenance I was glancing at
Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,
Nor have read the writing upon your face,
"I go hence soon to my resting-place;

"You may miss me then. But I shall not know
How many times you visit me there,
Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
There never at all. And I shall not care.
Should you censure me I shall take no heed
And even your praises no more shall need."

True: never you'll know. And you will not mind.
But shall I then slight you because of such?
Dear ghost, in the past did you ever find
The thought "What profit," move me much?
Yet abides the fact, indeed, the same,—
You are past love, praise, indifference, blame.

December 1912.

THE WALK

YOU did not walk with me
Of late to the hill-top tree
By the gated ways,
As in earlier days;
You were weak and lame,
So you never came,
And I went alone, and I did not mind,
Not thinking of you as left behind.

I walked up there to-day
Just in the former way;
Surveyed around
The familiar ground
By myself again:
What difference, then?
Only that underlying sense
Of the look of a room on returning thence.

RAIN ON A GRAVE

Clouds spout upon her
  Their waters amain
  In ruthless disdain,—
Her who but lately
  Had shivered with pain
As at touch of dishonour
If there had lit on her
So coldly, so straightly
  Such arrows of rain :

One who to shelter
  Her delicate head
Would quicken and quicken
  Each tentative tread
If drops chanced to pelt her
  That summertime spills
  In dust-paven rills
When thunder-clouds thicken
  And birds close their bills.

Would that I lay there
  And she were housed here !
Or better, together
Were folded away there
Exposed to one weather
We both,—who would stray there
When sunny the day there,
  Or evening was clear
  At the prime of the year.

Soon will be growing
  Green blades from her mound,
And daisies be showing
  Like stars on the ground,
Till she form part of them—
Ay—the sweet heart of them,
Loved beyond measure
With a child's pleasure
  All her life's round.

Jan. 31, 1913.

"I FOUND HER OUT THERE"

I FOUND her out there
On a slope few see,
That falls westwardly
To the salt-edged air,
Where the ocean breaks
On the purple strand,
And the hurricane shakes
The solid land.

I brought her here,
And have laid her to rest
In a noiseless nest
No sea beats near.
She will never be stirred
In her loamy cell
By the waves long heard
And loved so well.

So she does not sleep
By those haunted heights
The Atlantic smites
And the blind gales sweep,
Whence she often would gaze
At Dundagel's famed head,
While the dipping blaze
Dyed her face fire-red;

And would sigh at the tale
Of sunk Lyonnesse,
As a wind-tugged tress
Flapped her cheek like a flail;
Or listen at whiles
With a thought-bound brow
To the murmuring miles
She is far from now.

Yet her shade, maybe,
Will creep underground
Till it catch the sound
Of that western sea

As it swells and sobs
Where she once domiciled,
And joys in its throbs
With the heart of a child.

WITHOUT CEREMONY

IT was your way, my dear,
To vanish without a word
When callers, friends, or kin
Had left, and I hastened in
To rejoin you, as I inferred.

And when you'd a mind to career
Off anywhere—say to town—
You were all on a sudden gone
Before I had thought thereon,
Or noticed your trunks were down.

So, now that you disappear
For ever in that swift style,
Your meaning seems to me
Just as it used to be:
"Good-bye is not worth while!"

LAMENT

HOW she would have loved
A party to-day!—
Bright-hatted and gloved,
With table and tray
And chairs on the lawn
Her smiles would have shone
With welcomings. . . . But
She is shut, she is shut
From friendship's spell
In the jailing shell
Of her tiny cell.

Or she would have reigned
At a dinner to-night
With ardours unfeigned,
And a generous delight;
All in her abode
She'd have freely bestowed
On her guests. . . . But alas,
She is shut under grass
    Where no cups flow,
    Powerless to know
    That it might be so.

And she would have sought
With a child's eager glance
The shy snowdrops brought
By the new year's advance,
And peered in the rime
Of Candlemas-time
For crocuses . . . chanced
It that she were not tranced
    From sights she loved best;
    Wholly possessed
    By an infinite rest!

And we are here staying
Amid these stale things,
Who care not for gaying,
And those junketings
That used so to joy her,
And never to cloy her
As us they cloy! . . . But
She is shut, she is shut
    From the cheer of them, dead
    To all done and said
    In her yew-arched bed.

THE HAUNTER

He does not think that I haunt here nightly:
    How shall I let him know
That whither his fancy sets him wandering
    I, too, alertly go?—

Hover and hover a few feet from him
Just as I used to do,
But cannot answer the words he lifts me—
Only listen thereto!

When I could answer he did not say them:
When I could let him know
How I would like to join in his journeys
Seldom he wished to go.
Now that he goes and wants me with him
More than he used to do,
Never he sees my faithful phantom
Though he speaks thereto.

Yes, I companion him to places
Only dreamers know,
Where the shy hares print long paces,
Where the night rooks go;
Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
Close as his shade can do,
Always lacking the power to call to him,
Near as I reach thereto!

What a good haunter I am, O tell him!
Quickly make him know
If he but sigh since my loss befell him
Straight to his side I go.
Tell him a faithful one is doing
All that love can do
Still that his path may be worth pursuing,
And to bring peace thereto.

THE VOICE

WOMAN much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town

Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to existlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

December 1912.

HIS VISITOR

I COME across from Mellstock while the moon wastes weaker
To behold where I lived with you for twenty years and more:
I shall go in the gray, at the passing of the mail-train,
And need no setting open of the long familiar door
As before.

The change I notice in my once own quarters!
A brilliant budded border where the daisies used to be,
The rooms new painted, and the pictures altered,
And other cups and saucers, and no cosy nook for tea
As with me.

I discern the dim faces of the sleep-wrapt servants;
They are not those who tended me through feeble hours and strong,
But strangers quite, who never knew my rule here,
Who never saw me painting, never heard my softling song
Float along.

So I don't want to linger in this re-decked dwelling,
I feel too uneasy at the contrasts I behold,
And I make again for Mellstock to return here never,
And rejoin the roomy silence, and the mute and manifold
Souls of old.

1913.

A CIRCULAR

As "legal representative"
I read a missive not my own,
On new designs the senders give
    For clothes, in tints as shown.

Here figure blouses, gowns for tea,
And presentation-trains of state,
Charming ball-dresses, millinery,
    Warranted up to date.

And this gay-pictured, spring-time shout
Of Fashion, hails what lady proud?
Her who before last year ebbed out
    Was costumed in a shroud.

A DREAM OR NO

WHY go to Saint-Juliot? What's Juliot to me?
        Some strange necromancy
        But charmed me to fancy
That much of my life claims the spot as its key.

Yes. I have had dreams of that place in the West,
        And a maiden abiding
        Thereat as in hiding;
Fair-eyed and white-shouldered, broad-browed and brown-tressed.

And of how, coastward bound on a night long ago,
        There lonely I found her,
        The sea-birds around her,
And other than nigh things uncaring to know.

So sweet her life there (in my thought has it seemed)
        That quickly she drew me
        To take her unto me,
And lodge her long years with me. Such have I dreamed.

But nought of that maid from Saint-Juliot I see;
Can she ever have been here,
And shed her life's sheen here,
The woman I thought a long housemate with me?

Does there even a place like Saint-Juliot exist?
Or a Vallency Valley
With stream and leafed alley,
Or Beeny, or Bos with its flounce flinging mist?

February 1913.

AFTER A JOURNEY

HERETO I come to view a voiceless ghost;
Whither, O whither will its whim now draw me?
Up the cliff, down, till I'm lonely, lost,
And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me.
Where you will next be there's no knowing,
Facing round about me everywhere,
With your nut-coloured hair,
And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.

Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
Through the years, through the dead scenes I have tracked you;
What have you now found to say of our past—
Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you?
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?
Things were not lastly as firstly well
With us twain, you tell?
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

I see what you are doing: you are leading me on
To the spots we knew when we haunted here together,
The waterfall, above which the mist-bow shone
At the then fair hour in the then fair weather,
And the cave just under, with a voice still so hollow
That it seems to call out to me from forty years ago,
When you were all aglow,
And not the thin ghost that I now frailly follow!

Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see,
The waked birds preen and the seals flop lazily,
Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me,
For the stars close their shutters and the dawn whitens hazily.
Trust me, I mind not, though Life lours,
The bringing me here; nay, bring me here again!
I am just the same as when
Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.

PENTARGAN BAY.

A DEATH-DAY RECALLED

BEENY did not quiver,
Juliot grew not gray,
Thin Valency's river
Held its wonted way.
Bos seemed not to utter
Dimmest note of dirge,
Targan mouth a mutter
To its creamy surge.

Yet though these, unheeding,
Listless, passed the hour
Of her spirit's speeding,
She had, in her flower,
Sought and loved the places—
Much and often pined
For their lonely faces
When in towns confined.

Why did not Valency
In his purl deplore
One whose haunts were whence he
Drew his limpid store?
Why did Bos not thunder,
Targan apprehend
Body and Breath were sunder
Of their former friend?

BEENY CLIFF

March 1870—*March* 1913

I

O THE opal and the sapphire of that wandering western sea,
And the woman riding high above with bright hair flapping free—
The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved me.

II

The pale mews plained below us, and the waves seemed far away
In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their ceaseless babbling say,
As we laughed light-heartedly aloft on that clear-sunned March day.

III

A little cloud then cloaked us, and there flew an irised rain,
And the Atlantic dyed its levels with a dull misfeatured stain,
And then the sun burst out again, and purples prinked the main.

IV

—Still in all its chasmal beauty bulks old Beeny to the sky,
And shall she and I not go there once again now March is nigh,
And the sweet things said in that March say anew there by and by?

V

What if still in chasmal beauty looms that wild weird western shore,
The woman now is—elsewhere—whom the ambling pony bore,
And nor knows nor cares for Beeny, and will laugh there nevermore.

AT CASTLE BOTEREL

As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,
 And the drizzle bedrenches the waggonette,
I look behind at the fading byway,
 And see on its slope, now glistening wet,
  Distinctly yet

Myself and a girlish form benighted
In dry March weather. We climb the road
Beside a chaise. We had just alighted
To ease the sturdy pony's load
When he sighed and slowed.

What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
Matters not much, nor to what it led,—
Something that life will not be balked of
Without rude reason till hope is dead,
And feeling fled.

It filled but a minute. But was there ever
A time of such quality, since or before,
In that hill's story? To one mind never,
Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
By thousands more.

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
And much have they faced there, first and last,
Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
But what they record in colour and cast
Is—that we two passed.

And to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,
In mindless rote, has ruled from sight
The substance now, one phantom figure
Remains on the slope, as when that night
Saw us alight.

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again.

March 1913.

PLACES

Nobody says: Ah, that is the place
Where chanced, in the hollow of years ago,
What none of the Three Towns cared to know—
The birth of a little girl of grace—

The sweetest the house saw, first or last;
Yet it was so
On that day long past.

Nobody thinks: There, there she lay
In a room by the Hoe, like the bud of a flower,
And listened, just after the bedtime hour,
To the stammering chimes that used to play
The quaint Old Hundred-and-Thirteenth tune
In Saint Andrew's tower
Night, morn, and noon.

Nobody calls to mind that here
Upon Boterel Hill, where the waggoners skid,
With cheeks whose airy flush outbid
Fresh fruit in bloom, and free of fear,
She cantered down, as if she must fall
(Though she never did),
To the charm of all.

Nay: one there is to whom these things,
That nobody else's mind calls back,
Have a savour that scenes in being lack,
And a presence more than the actual brings;
To whom to-day is beneaped and stale,
And its urgent clack
But a vapid tale.

PLYMOUTH, *March* 1913.

THE PHANTOM HORSEWOMAN

I

QUEER are the ways of a man I know:
He comes and stands
In a careworn craze,
And looks at the sands
And the seaward haze
With moveless hands
And face and gaze,
Then turns to go . . .
And what does he see when he gazes so?

II

They say he sees as an instant thing
More clear than to-day,
A sweet soft scene
That once was in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring—
A phantom of his own figuring.

III

Of this vision of his they might say more:
Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain—day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright—
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

IV

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

1913.

THE SPELL OF THE ROSE

"I MEAN to build a hall anon,
And shape two turrets there,
And a broad newelled stair,
And a cool well for crystal water;
Yes; I will build a hall anon,
Plant roses love shall feed upon,
And apple-trees and pear."

He set to build the manor-hall,
And shaped the turrets there,
And the broad newelled stair,
And the cool well for crystal water;
He built for me that manor-hall,
And planted many trees withal,
But no rose anywhere.

And as he planted never a rose
That bears the flower of love,
Though other flowers throve
Some heart-bane moved our souls to sever
Since he had planted never a rose;
And misconceits raised horrid shows,
And agonies came thereof.

"I'll mend these miseries," then said I,
And so, at dead of night,
I went and, screened from sight,
That nought should keep our souls in severance,
I set a rose-bush. "This," said I,
"May end divisions dire and wry,
And long-drawn days of blight."

But I was called from earth—yea, called
Before my rose-bush grew;
And would that now I knew
What feels he of the tree I planted,
And whether, after I was called
To be a ghost, he, as of old,
Gave me his heart anew!

Perhaps now blooms that queen of trees
I set but saw not grow,
And he, beside its glow—
Eyes couched of the mis-vision that blurred me—
Ay, there beside that queen of trees
He sees me as I was, though sees
Too late to tell me so!

ST. LAUNCE'S REVISITED

SLIP back, Time!
Yet again I am nearing
Castle and keep, uprearing
Gray, as in my prime.

At the inn
Smiling nigh, why is it
Not as on my visit
When hope and I were twin?

Groom and jade
Whom I found here, moulder;
Strange the tavern-holder,
Strange the tap-maid.

Here I hired
Horse and man for bearing
Me on my wayfaring
To the door desired.

Evening gloomed
As I journeyed forward
To the faces shoreward,
Till their dwelling loomed.

If again
Towards the Atlantic sea there
I should speed, they'd be there
Surely now as then? . . .

Why waste thought,
When I know them vanished
Under earth; yea, banished
Ever into nought!

WHERE THE PICNIC WAS

WHERE we made the fire
In the summer time
Of branch and briar
On the hill to the sea,
I slowly climb
Through winter mire,
And scan and trace
The forsaken place
Quite readily.

Now a cold wind blows,
And the grass is gray,
But the spot still shows
As a burnt circle—aye,
And stick-ends, charred,
Still strew the sward
Whereon I stand,
Last relic of the band
Who came that day!

Yes, I am here
Just as last year,
And the sea breathes brine
From its strange straight line
Up hither, the same
As when we four came.
—But two have wandered far
From this grassy rise
Into urban roar
Where no picnics are,
And one—has shut her eyes
For evermore.

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES

THE WISTFUL LADY

"LOVE, while you were away there came to me—
From whence I cannot tell—
A plaintive lady pale and passionless,
Who laid her eyes upon me critically,
And weighed me with a wearing wistfulness,
As if she knew me well."

"I saw no lady of that wistful sort
As I came riding home.
Perhaps she was some dame the Fates constrain
By memories sadder than she can support,
Or by unhappy vacancy of brain,
To leave her roof and roam?"

"Ah, but she knew me. And before this time
I have seen her, lending ear
To my light outdoor words, and pondering each,
Her frail white finger swayed in pantomime,
As if she fain would close with me in speech,
And yet would not come near.

"And once I saw her beckoning with her hand
As I came into sight
At an upper window. And I at last went out;
But when I reached where she had seemed to stand,
And wandered up and down and searched about,
I found she had vanished quite."

Then thought I how my dead Love used to say,
With a small smile, when she
Was waning wan, that she would hover round
And show herself after her passing day
To any newer Love I might have found,
But show her not to me.

THE WOMAN IN THE RYE

"WHY do you stand in the dripping rye,
Cold-lipped, unconscious, wet to the knee,
When there are firesides near?" said I.
"I told him I wished him dead," said she.

"Yea, cried it in my haste to one
Whom I had loved, whom I well loved still;
And die he did. And I hate the sun,
And stand here lonely, aching, chill;

"Stand waiting, waiting under skies
That blow reproach, the while I see
The rooks sheer off to where he lies
Wrapt in a peace withheld from me!"

THE CHEVAL-GLASS

WHY do you harbour that great cheval-glass
Filling up your narrow room?
You never preen or plume
Or look in a week at your full-length figure—
Picture of bachelor gloom!

"Well, when I dwelt in ancient England,
Renting the valley farm,
Thoughtless of all heart-harm,
I used to gaze at the parson's daughter,
A creature of nameless charm.

"Thither there came a lover and won her,
Carried her off from my view.

O it was then I knew
Misery of a cast undreamt of—
More than, indeed, my due!

"Then far rumours of her ill-usage
Came, like a chilling breath
When a man languisheth;
Followed by news that her mind lost balance,
And, in a space, of her death.

"Soon sank her father; and next was the auction—
Everything to be sold:
Mid things new and old
Stood this glass in her former chamber,
Long in her use, I was told.

"Well, I awaited the sale and bought it. . . .
There by my bed it stands,
And as the dawn expands
Often I see her pale-faced form there
Brushing her hair's bright bands.

"There, too, at pallid midnight moments
Quick she will come to my call,
Smile from the frame withal
Ponderingly, as she used to regard me
Passing her father's wall.

"So that it was for its revelations
I brought it oversea,
And drag it about with me. . . .
Anon I shall break it and bury its fragments
Where my grave is to be."

THE RE-ENACTMENT

BETWEEN the folding sea-downs,
In the gloom
Of a wailful wintry nightfall,
When the boom
Of the ocean, like a hammering in a hollow tomb,

Throbbed up the copse-clothed valley
From the shore
To the chamber where I darkled,
Sunk and sore
With gray ponderings why my Loved one had not come before

To salute me in the dwelling
That of late
I had hired to waste a while in—
Dim of date,
Quaint, and remote—wherein I now expectant sate;

On the solitude, unsignalled,
Broke a man
Who, in air as if at home there,
Seemed to scan
Every fire-flecked nook of the apartment span by span.

A stranger's and no lover's
Eyes were these,
Eyes of a man who measures
What he sees
But vaguely, as if wrapt in filmy phantasies.

Yea, his bearing was so absent
As he stood,
It bespoke a chord so plaintive
In his mood,
That soon I judged he would not wrong my quietude.

"Ah—the supper is just ready!"
Then he said,
"And the years'-long-binned Madeira
Flashes red!"
(There was no wine, no food, no supper-table spread.)

"You will forgive my coming,
Lady fair?
I see you as at that time
Rising there,
The self-same curious querying in your eyes and air.

Yet no. How so? You wear not
The same gown,
Your locks show woful difference,
Are not brown:
What, is it not as when I hither came from town?

"And the place. . . . But you seem other—
Can it be?
What's this that Time is doing
Unto me?
You dwell here, unknown woman? . . . Whereabouts, then, is she?

"And the house-things are much shifted.—
Put them where
They stood on this night's fellow;
Shift her chair:
Here was the couch: and the piano should be there."

I indulged him, verily nerve-strained
Being alone,
And I moved the things as bidden,
One by one,
And feigned to push the old piano where he had shown.

"Aha—now I can see her!
Stand aside:
Don't thrust her from the table
Where, meek-eyed,
She makes attempt with matron-manners to preside.

"She serves me: now she rises,
Goes to play. . . .
But you obstruct her, fill her
With dismay,
And embarrassed, scared, she vanishes away!"

And, as 'twere useless longer
To persist,
He sighed, and sought the entry
Ere I wist,
And retreated, disappearing soundless in the mist.

That here some mighty passion
Once had burned,
Which still the walls enghosted,
I discerned,
And that by its strong spell mine might be overturned.

I sat depressed; till, later,
My Love came;
But something in the chamber
Dimmed our flame,—
An emanation, making our due words fall tame,

As if the intenser drama
Shown me there
Of what the walls had witnessed
Filled the air,
And left no room for later passion anywhere.

So came it that our fervours
Did quite fail
Of future consummation—
Being made quail
By the weird witchery of the parlour's hidden tale,

Which I, as years passed, faintly
Learnt to trace,—
One of sad love, born full-winged
In that place
Where the predestined sorrowers first stood face to face.

And as that month of winter
Circles round,
And the evening of the date-day
Grows embrowned,
I am conscious of those presences, and sit spellbound.

There, often—lone, forsaken—
Queries breed
Within me; whether a phantom
Had my heed
On that strange night, or was it some wrecked heart indeed?

HER SECRET

THAT love's dull smart distressed my heart
He shrewdly learnt to see,
But that I was in love with a dead man
Never suspected he.

He searched for the trace of a pictured face,
He watched each missive come,
And a sheet that seemed like a love-line
Wrought his look lurid and numb.

He dogged my feet to the city street,
He followed me to the sea,
But not to the nigh, still churchyard
Did he dream of following me!

"SHE CHARGED ME"

SHE charged me with having said this and that
To another woman long years before,
In the very parlour where we sat,—

Sat on a night when the endless pour
Of rain on the roof and the road below
Bent the spring of the spirit more and more. . . .

—So charged she me; and the Cupid's bow
Of her mouth was hard, and her eyes, and her face,
And her white forefinger lifted slow.

Had she done it gently, or shown a trace
That not too curiously would she view
A folly flown ere her reign had place,

A kiss might have closed it. But I knew
From the fall of each word, and the pause between,
That the curtain would drop upon us two
Ere long, in our play of slave and queen.

THE NEWCOMER'S WIFE

HE paused on the sill of a door ajar
That screened a lively liquor-bar,
For the name had reached him through the door
Of her he had married the week before.

"We called her the Hack of the Parade;
But she was discreet in the games she played;
If slightly worn, she's pretty yet,
And gossips, after all, forget:

"And he knows nothing of her past;
I am glad the girl's in luck at last;
Such ones, though stale to native eyes,
Newcomers snatch at as a prize."

"Yes, being a stranger he sees her blent
Of all that's fresh and innocent,
Nor dreams how many a love-campaign
She had enjoyed before his reign!"

That night there was the splash of a fall
Over the slimy harbour-wall:
They searched, and at the deepest place
Found him with crabs upon his face.

A CONVERSATION AT DAWN

HE lay awake, with a harassed air,
And she, in her cloud of loose lank hair,
        Seemed trouble-tried
As the dawn drew in on their faces there.

The chamber looked far over the sea
From a white hotel on a white-stoned quay,
        And stepping a stride
He parted the window-drapery.

Above the level horizon spread
The sunrise, firing them foot to head
        From its smouldering lair,
And painting their pillows with dyes of red.

"What strange disquiets have stirred you, dear,
This dragging night, with starts in fear
        Of me, as it were,
Or of something evil hovering near?"

"My husband, can I have fear of you?
What should one fear from a man whom few,
        Or none, had matched
In that late long spell of delays undue!"

He watched her eyes in the heaving sun:
"Then what has kept, O reticent one,
        Those lids unlatched—
Anything promised I've not yet done?"

"O it's not a broken promise of yours
(For what quite lightly your lip assures
        The due time brings)
That has troubled my sleep, and no waking cures!" . . .

"I have shaped my will; 'tis at hand," said he;
"I subscribe it to-day, that no risk there be
        In the hap of things
Of my leaving you menaced by poverty."

"That a boon provision I'm safe to get,
Signed, sealed by my lord as it were a debt,
        I cannot doubt,
Or ever this peering sun be set."

"But you flung my arms away from your side,
And faced the wall. No month-old bride
        Ere the tour be out
In an air so loth can be justified?

"Ah—had you a male friend once loved well,
Upon whose suit disaster fell
        And frustrance swift?
Honest you are, and may care to tell."

She lay impassive, and nothing broke
The stillness other than, stroke by stroke,
The lazy lift
Of the tide below them ; till she spoke :

" I once had a friend—a Love, if you will—
Whose wife forsook him, and sank until
She was made a thrall
In a prison-cell for a deed of ill. . . .

" He remained alone ; and we met—to love,
But barring legitimate joy thereof
Stood a doorless wall,
Though we prized each other all else above.

" And this was why, though I'd touched my prime,
I put off suitors from time to time—
Yourself with the rest—
Till friends, who approved you, called it crime,

" And when misgivings weighed on me
In my lover's absence, hurriedly,
And much distrest,
I took you. . . . Ah, that such could be ! . . .

" Now, saw you when crossing from yonder shore
At yesternoon, that the packet bore
On a white-wreathed bier
A coffined body towards the fore ?

" Well, while you stood at the other end,
The loungers talked, and I couldn't but lend
A listening ear,
For they named the dead. 'Twas the wife of my friend.

" He was there, but did not note me, veiled,
Yet I saw that a joy, as of one unjailed,
Now shone in his gaze ;
He knew not his hope of me just had failed !

" They had brought her home : she was born in this isle ;
And he will return to his domicile,
And pass his days
Alone, and not as he dreamt erstwhile ! "

"—So you've lost a sprucer spouse than I!"
She held her peace, as if fain deny
She would indeed
For his pleasure's sake, but could lip no lie.

"One far less formal and plain and slow!"
She let the laconic assertion go
As if of need
She held the conviction that it was so.

"Regard me as his he always should,
He had said, and wed me he vowed he would
In his prime or sere
Most verily do, if ever he could;

"And this fulfilment is now his aim,
For a letter, addressed in my maiden name,
Has dogged me here,
Reminding me faithfully of his claim;

"And it started a hope like a lightning-streak
That I might go to him—say for a week—
And afford you right
To put me away, and your vows unspeak.

"To be sure you have said, as of dim intent,
That marriage is a plain event
Of black and white,
Without any ghost of sentiment,

"And my heart has quailed.—But deny it true
That you will never this lock undo!
No God intends
To thwart the yearning He's father to!"

The husband hemmed, then blandly bowed
In the light of the angry morning cloud.
"So my idyll ends,
And a drama opens!" he mused aloud;

And his features froze. "You may take it as true
That I will never this lock undo
For so depraved
A passion as that which kindles you!"

Said she: "I am sorry you see it so;
I had hoped you might have let me go,
And thus been saved
The pain of learning there's more to know."

"More? What may that be? Gad, I think
You have told me enough to make me blink!
Yet if more remain
Then own it to me. I will not shrink!"

"Well, it is this. As we could not see
That a legal marriage would ever be,
To end our pain
We united ourselves informally;

"And vowed at a chancel-altar nigh,
With book and ring, a lifelong tie;
A contract vain
To the world, but real to Him on High."

"And you became as his wife?"—"I did."—
He stood as stiff as a caryatid,
And said, "Indeed! . . .
No matter. You're mine, whatever you've hid!"

"But is it right! When I only gave
My hand to you in a sweat to save,
Through desperate need
(As I thought), my fame, for I was not brave!"

"To save your fame? Your meaning is dim,
For nobody knew of your altar-whim?"
"I mean—I feared
There might be fruit of my tie with him;

"And to cloak it by marriage I'm not the first,
Though, maybe, morally most accurst
Through your unpeered
And strict uprightness. That's the worst!

"While yesterday his worn contours
Convinced me that love like his endures,
And that my troth-plight
Had been his, in fact, and not truly yours."

"So, my lady, you raise the veil by degrees. . . .
I own this last is enough to freeze
The warmest wight!
Now hear the other side, if you please:

"I did say once, though without intent,
That marriage is a plain event
Of black and white,
Whatever may be its sentiment:

"I'll act accordingly, none the less
That you soiled the contract in time of stress,
Thereto induced
By the feared results of your wantonness.

"But the thing is over, and no one knows,
And it's nought to the future what you disclose.
That you'll be loosed
For such an episode, don't suppose!

"No: I'll not free you. And if it appear
There was too good ground for your first fear
From your amorous tricks,
I'll father the child. Yes, by God, my dear!

"Even should you fly to his arms, I'll damn
Opinion, and fetch you; treat as sham
Your mutinous kicks,
And whip you home. That's the sort I am!"

She whitened. "Enough. . . . Since you disapprove
I'll yield in silence, and never move
Till my last pulse ticks
A footstep from the domestic groove."

"Then swear it," he said, "and your king uncrown."
He drew her forth in her long white gown,
And she knelt and swore.
"Good. Now you may go and again lie down.

"Since you've played these pranks and given no sign,
You shall crave this man of yours; pine and pine
With sighings sore,
Till I've starved your love for him; nailed you mine!

"I'm a practical man, and want no tears;
You've made a fool of me, it appears;
That you don't again
Is a lesson I'll teach you in future years."

She answered not, lying listlessly
With her dark dry eyes on the coppery sea,
That now and then
Flung its lazy flounce at the neighbouring quay.

1910.

A KING'S SOLILOQUY

ON THE NIGHT OF HIS FUNERAL

FROM the slow march and muffled drum,
And crowds distrest,
And book and bell, at length I have come
To my full rest.

A ten years' rule beneath the sun
Is wound up here,
And what I have done, what left undone,
Figures out clear.

Yet in the estimate of such
It grieves me more
That I by some was loved so much
Than that I bore,

From others, judgment of that hue
Which over-hope
Breeds from a theoretic view
Of regal scope.

For kingly opportunities
Right many have sighed;
How best to bear its devilries
Those learn who have tried!

I have eaten the fat and drunk the sweet,
Lived the life out

From the first greeting glad drum-beat
To the last shout.

What pleasure earth affords to kings
I have enjoyed
Through its long vivid pulse-stirrings
Even till it cloyed.

What days of drudgery, nights of stress
Can cark a throne,
Even one maintained in peacefulness,
I too have known.

And so, I think, could I step back
To life again,
I should prefer the average track
Of average men,

Since, as with them, what kingship would
It cannot do,
Nor to first thoughts however good
Hold itself true.

Something binds hard the royal hand,
As all that be,
And it is That has shaped, has planned
My acts and me.

May 1910.

THE CORONATION

At Westminster, hid from the light of day,
Many who once had shone as monarchs lay.

Edward the Pious, and two Edwards more,
The second Richard, Henrys three or four;

That is to say, those who were called the Third,
Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth (the much self-widowered);

And James the Scot, and near him Charles the Second,
And, too, the second George could there be reckoned.

Of women, Mary and Queen Elizabeth,
And Anne, all silent in a musing death;

And William's Mary, and Mary, Queen of Scots,
And consort-queens whose names oblivion blots;

And several more whose chronicle one sees
Adorning ancient royal pedigrees.

—Now, as they drowsed on, freed from Life's old thrall,
And heedless, save of things exceptional,

Said one: "What means this throbbing thudding sound
That reaches to us here from overground;

"A sound of chisels, augers, planes, and saws,
Infringing all ecclesiastic laws?

"And these tons-weight of timber on us pressed,
Unfelt here since we entered into rest?

"Surely, at least to us, being corpses royal,
A meet repose is owing by the loyal?"

"—Perhaps a scaffold!" Mary Stuart sighed,
"If such still be. It was that way I died."

—"Ods! Far more like," said he the many-wived,
"That for a wedding 'tis this work's contrived.

"Ha-ha! I never would bow down to Rimmon,
But I had a rare time with those six women!"

"Not all at once?" gasped he who loved confession.
"Nay, nay!" said Hal. "That would have been transgression."

"—They build a catafalque here, black and tall,
Perhaps," mused Richard, "for some funeral?"

And Anne chimed in: "Ah, yes: it may be so!"
"Nay!" squeaked Eliza. "Little you seem to know—

"Clearly 'tis for some crowning here in state,
As they crowned us at our long bygone date;

"Though we'd no such a power of carpentry,
But let the ancient architecture be;

"If I were up there where the parsons sit,
In one of my gold robes, I'd see to it!"

"But you are not," Charles chuckled. "You are here,
And never will know the sun again, my dear!"

"Yea," whispered those whom no one had addressed;
"With slow, sad march, amid a folk distressed,
We were brought here, to take our dusty rest.

"And here, alas, in darkness laid below,
We'll wait and listen, and endure the show. . . .
Clamour dogs kingship; afterwards not so!"

1911.

AQUAE SULIS

THE chimes called midnight, just at interlune,
And the daytime parle on the Roman investigations
Was shut to silence, save for the husky tune
The bubbling waters played near the excavations.

And a warm air came up from underground,
And a flutter, as of a filmy shape unsepulchred,
That collected itself, and waited, and looked around:
Nothing was seen, but utterances could be heard:

Those of the goddess whose shrine was beneath the pile
Of the God with the baldachined altar overhead:
"And what did you win by raising this nave and aisle
Close on the site of the temple I tenanted?

"The notes of your organ have thrilled down out of view
To the earth-clogged wrecks of my edifice many a year,
Though stately and shining once—ay, long ere you
Had set up crucifix and candle here.

"Your priests have trampled the dust of mine without rueing,
Despising the joys of man whom I so much loved,
Though my springs boil on by your Gothic arcades and pewing,
And sculptures crude. . . . Would Jove they could be removed!"

"Repress, O lady proud, your traditional ires;
You know not by what a frail thread we equally hang;

It is said we are images both—twitched by people's desires;
And that I, like you, fail as a song men yesterday sang!

"What—a Jumping-jack you, and myself but a poor Jumping-jill,
Now worm-eaten, times agone twitched at Humanity's bid?
O I cannot endure it!—But, chance to us whatso there will,
Let us kiss and be friends! Come, agree you?"—None heard if
he did. . . .

And the olden dark hid the cavities late laid bare,
And all was suspended and soundless as before,
Except for a gossamery noise fading off in the air,
And the boiling voice of the waters' medicinal pour.

BATH.

SEVENTY-FOUR AND TWENTY

HERE goes a man of seventy-four,
Who sees not what life means for him,
And here another in years a score
Who reads its very figure and trim.

The one who shall walk to-day with me
Is not the youth who gazes far,
But the breezy sire who cannot see
What Earth's ingrained conditions are.

THE ELOPEMENT

"A WOMAN never agreed to it!" said my knowing friend to me.
"That one thing she'd refuse to do for Solomon's mines in fee:
No woman ever will make herself look older than she is."
I did not answer; but I thought, "you err there, ancient Quiz."

It took a rare one, true, to do it; for she was surely rare—
As rare a soul at that sweet time of her life as she was fair,
And urging heart-heaves, too, were strong, for ours was a passionate
case,
Yea, passionate enough to lead to freaking with that young face.

I have told no one about it, should perhaps make few believe,
But I think it over now that life looms dull and years bereave,
How blank we stood at our bright wits' end, two blown barks in distress,
How self-regard in her was slain by her large tenderness.

I said: "The only chance for us in a crisis of this kind
Is going it thorough!"—"Yes," she calmly breathed. "Well, I don't mind."
And we blanched her dark locks ruthlessly: set wrinkles on her brow;
Ay—she was a right rare woman then, whatever she may be now.

That night we heard a coach drive up, and questions asked below.
"A gent with an elderly wife, sir," was returned from the bureau.
And the wheels went rattling on, and free at last from public ken
We washed all off in her chamber and restored her youth again.

How many years ago it was! Some fifty can it be
Since that adventure held us, and she played old wife to me?
But in time convention won her, as it wins all women at last,
And now she is rich and respectable, and time has buried the past.

"I ROSE UP AS MY CUSTOM IS'

I ROSE up as my custom is
On the eve of All-Souls' day,
And left my grave for an hour or so
To call on those I used to know
Before I passed away.

I visited my former Love
As she lay by her husband's side;
I asked her if life pleased her, now
She was rid of a poet wrung in brow,
And crazed with the ills he eyed;

Who used to drag her here and there
Wherever his fancies led,
And point out pale phantasmal things,

And talk of vain vague purposings
That she discredited.

She was quite civil, and replied,
"Old comrade, is that you?
Well, on the whole, I like my life.—
I know I swore I'd be no wife,
But what was I to do?

"You see, of all men for my sex
A poet is the worst;
Women are practical, and they
Crave the wherewith to pay their way,
And slake their social thirst.

"You were a poet—quite the ideal
That we all love awhile:
But look at this man snoring here—
He's no romantic chanticleer,
Yet keeps me in good style.

"He makes no quest into my thoughts,
But a poet wants to know
What one has felt from earliest days,
Why one thought not in other ways,
And one's Loves of long ago."

Her words benumbed my fond faint ghost;
The nightmares neighed from their stalls,
The vampires screeched, the harpies flew,
And under the dim dawn I withdrew
To Death's inviolate halls.

A WEEK

On Monday night I closed my door,
And thought you were not as heretofore,
And little cared if we met no more.

I seemed on Tuesday night to trace
Something beyond mere commonplace
In your ideas, and heart, and face.

On Wednesday I did not opine
Your life would ever be one with mine,
Though if it were we should well combine.

On Thursday noon I liked you well,
And fondly felt that we must dwell
Not far apart, whatever befell.

On Friday it was with a thrill
In gazing towards your distant vill
I owned you were my dear one still.

I saw you wholly to my mind
On Saturday—even one who shrined
All that was best of womankind.

As wing-clipt sea-gull for the sea
On Sunday night I longed for thee,
Without whom life were waste to me!

HAD YOU WEPT

HAD you wept; had you but neared me with a hazed uncertain ray,
Dewy as the face of the dawn, in your large and luminous eye,
Then would have come back all the joys the tidings had slain that day,
And a new beginning, a fresh fair heaven, have smoothed the things awry.
But you were less feebly human, and no passionate need for clinging
Possessed your soul to overthrow reserve when I came near;
Ay, though you suffer as much as I from storms the hours are bringing
Upon your heart and mine, I never see you shed a tear.

The deep strong woman is weakest, the weak one is the strong;
The weapon of all weapons best for winning, you have not used;
Have you never been able, or would you not, through the evil times and long?
Has not the gift been given you, or such gift have you refused?

When I bade me not absolve you on that evening or the morrow,
Why did you not make war on me with those who weep like rain?
You felt too much, so gained no balm for all your torrid sorrow,
And hence our deep division, and our dark undying pain.

BEREFT, SHE THINKS SHE DREAMS

I DREAM that the dearest I ever knew
Has died and been entombed.
I am sure it's a dream that cannot be true,
But I am so overgloomed
By its persistence, that I would gladly
Have quick death take me,
Rather than longer think thus sadly;
So wake me, wake me!

It has lasted days, but minute and hour
I expect to get aroused
And find him as usual in the bower
Where we so happily housed.
Yet stays this nightmare too appalling,
And like a web shakes me,
And piteously I keep on calling,
And no one wakes me!

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

"WHAT do you see in that time-touched stone,
When nothing is there
But ashen blankness, although you give it
A rigid stare?

"You look not quite as if you saw,
But as if you heard,
Parting your lips, and treading softly
As mouse or bird.

"It is only the base of a pillar, they'll tell you,
That came to us

From a far old hill men used to name
        Areopagus."

—"I know no art, and I only view
        A stone from a wall,
But I am thinking that stone has echoed
        The voice of Paul,

"Paul as he stood and preached beside it
        Facing the crowd,
A small gaunt figure with wasted features,
        Calling out loud

"Words that in all their intimate accents
        Pattered upon
That marble front, and were wide reflected,
        And then were gone.

"I'm a labouring man, and know but little,
        Or nothing at all;
But I can't help thinking that stone once echoed
        The voice of Paul."

IN THE SERVANTS' QUARTERS

"MAN, you too, aren't you, one of these rough followers of the
        criminal?
All hanging hereabout to gather how he's going to bear
Examination in the hall." She flung disdainful glances on
The shabby figure standing at the fire with others there,
        Who warmed them by its flare.

"No indeed, my skipping maiden: I know nothing of the trial
        here,
Or criminal, if so he be.—I chanced to come this way,
And the fire shone out into the dawn, and morning airs are cold
        now;
I, too, was drawn in part by charms I see before me play,
        That I see not every day."

"Ha, ha!" then laughed the constables who also stood to warm
themselves,
The while another maiden scrutinized his features hard,
As the blaze threw into contrast every line and knot that wrinkled
them,
Exclaiming, "Why, last night when he was brought in by the
guard,
You were with him in the yard!"

"Nay, nay, you teasing wench, I say! You know you speak
mistakenly.
Cannot a tired pedestrian who has legged it long and far
Here on his way from northern parts, engrossed in humble
marketings,
Come in and rest awhile, although judicial doings are
Afoot by morning star?"

"O, come, come!" laughed the constables. "Why, man, you
speak the dialect
He uses in his answers; you can hear him up the stairs.
So own it. We sha'n't hurt ye. There he's speaking now!
His syllables
Are those you sound yourself when you are talking unawares,
As this pretty girl declares."

"And you shudder when his chain clinks!" she rejoined. "O
yes, I noticed it.
And you winced, too, when those cuffs they gave him echoed to
us here.
They'll soon be coming down, and you may then have to defend
yourself
Unless you hold your tongue, or go away and keep you clear
When he's led to judgment near!"

"No! I'll be damned in hell if I know anything about the man!
No single thing about him more than everybody knows!
Must not I even warm my hands but I am charged with
blasphemies?" . . .
—His face convulses as the morning cock that moment crows,
And he droops, and turns, and goes.

THE OBLITERATE TOMB

"MORE than half my life long
Did they weigh me falsely, to my bitter wrong,
But they all have shrunk away into the silence
Like a lost song.

"And the day has dawned and come
For forgiveness, when the past may hold it dumb
On the once reverberate words of hatred uttered
Half in delirium. . . .

"With folded lips and hands
They lie and wait what next the Will commands,
And doubtless think, if think they can: 'Let discord
Sink with Life's sands!'

"By these late years their names,
Their virtues, their hereditary claims,
May be as near defacement at their grave-place
As are their fames."

—Such thoughts bechanced to seize
A traveller's mind—a man of memories—
As he set foot within the western city
Where had died these

Who in their lifetime deemed
Him their chief enemy—one whose brain had schemed
To get their dingy greatness deeplier dingied
And disesteemed.

So, sojourning in their town,
He mused on them and on their once renown,
And said, "I'll seek their resting-place to-morrow
Ere I lie down,

"And end, lest I forget,
Those ires of many years that I regret,
Renew their names, that men may see some liegeness
Is left them yet."

Duly next night he went
And sought the church he had known them to frequent,
And wandered, lantern-bearing, in the precincts,
Where they lay pent,

Till by remembrance led
He stood at length beside their slighted bed,
Above which, truly, scarce a line or letter
Could now be read.

"Thus years obliterate
Their graven worth, their chronicle, their date!
At once I'll garnish and revive the record
Of their past state,

"That still the sage may say
In pensive progress here where they decay,
'This stone records a luminous line whose talents
Told in their day.'"

While dreaming thus he turned,
For a form shadowed where they lay inurned,
And he beheld a stranger in foreign vesture,
And tropic-burned.

"Sir, I am right pleased to view
That ancestors of mine should interest you,
For I have fared of purpose here to find them. .
They are time-worn, true,

"But that's a fault, at most,
Carvers can cure. On the Pacific coast
I have vowed for long that relics of my forbears
I'd trace ere lost,

"And hitherward I come,
Before this same old Time shall strike me numb,
To carry it out."—"Strange, this is!" said the other;
"What mind shall plumb

"Coincident design!
Though these my father's enemies were and mine,
I nourished a like purpose—to restore them
Each letter and line."

"Such magnanimity
Is now not needed, sir; for you will see
That since I am here, a thing like this is, plainly,
Best done by me."

The other bowed, and left,
Crestfallen in sentiment, as one bereft
Of some fair object he had been moved to cherish,
By hands more deft.

And as he slept that night
The phantoms of the ensepulchred stood upright
Before him, trembling that he had set him seeking
Their charnel-site.

And, as unknowing his ruth,
Asked as with terrors founded not on truth
Why he should want them. "Ha," they hollowly hackered,
"You come, forsooth,

"By stealth to obliterate
Our graven worth, our chronicle, our date,
That our descendant may not gild the record
Of our past state,

"And that no sage may say
In pensive progress near where we decay:
'This stone records a luminous line whose talents
Told in their day.'"

Upon the morrow he went,
And to that town and churchyard never bent
His ageing footsteps till, some twelvemonths onward,
An accident

Once more detained him there;
And, stirred by hauntings, he must needs repair
To where the tomb was. Lo, it stood still wasting
In no man's care.

And so the tomb remained
Untouched, untended, crumbling, weather-stained,
And though the one-time foe was fain to right it
He still refrained.

"I'll set about it when
I am sure he'll come no more. Best wait till then."
But so it was that never the kinsman entered
That city again.

Till doubts grew keen
If it had chanced not that the figure seen
Shaped but in dream on that dim doubtful midnight.
Such things had been. . . .

So, the well-meaner died
While waiting tremulously unsatisfied
That no return of the family's foreign scion
Would still betide.

And many years slid by,
And active church-restorers cast their eye
Upon the ancient garth and hoary building
The tomb stood nigh.

And when they had scraped each wall,
Pulled out the stately pews, and smartened all,
"It will be well," declared the spruce church-warden,
"To overhaul

"And broaden this path where shown;
Nothing prevents it but an old tombstone
Pertaining to a family forgotten,
Of deeds unknown.

"Their names can scarce be read,
Depend on't, all who care for them are dead."
So went the tomb, whose shards were as path-paving
Distributed.

Over it and about
Men's footsteps beat, and wind and waterspout,
Until the names, aforetime gnawed by weathers,
Were quite worn out.

So that no sage can say
In pensive progress near where they decay,
"This stone records a luminous line whose talents
Told in their day."

"REGRET NOT ME"

REGRET not me;
Beneath the sunny tree
I lie uncaring, slumbering peacefully.

Swift as the light
I flew my faery flight;
Ecstatically I moved, and feared no night.

I did not know
That heydays fade and go,
But deemed that what was would be always so.

I skipped at morn
Between the yellowing corn,
Thinking it good and glorious to be born.

I ran at eves
Among the piled-up sheaves,
Dreaming, "I grieve not, therefore nothing grieves."

Now soon will come
The apple, pear, and plum,
And hinds will sing, and autumn insects hum.

Again you will fare
To cider-makings rare,
And junketings; but I shall not be there.

Yet gaily sing
Until the pewter ring
Those songs we sang when we went gipsying.

And lightly dance
Some triple-timed romance
In coupled figures, and forget mischance;

And mourn not me
Beneath the yellowing tree;
For I shall mind not, slumbering peacefully.

THE RECALCITRANTS

LET us off and search, and find a place
Where yours and mine can be natural lives,
Where no one comes who dissects and dives
And proclaims that ours is a curious case,
Which its touch of romance can scarcely grace.

You would think it strange at first, but then
Everything has been strange in its time.
When some one said on a day of the prime
He would bow to no brazen god again
He doubtless dazed the mass of men.

None will recognize us as a pair whose claims
To righteous judgment we care not making;
Who have doubted if breath be worth the taking,
And have no respect for the current fames
Whence the savour has flown while abide the names.

We have found us already shunned, disdained,
And for re-acceptance have not once striven;
Whatever offence our course has given
The brunt thereof we have long sustained.
Well, let us away, scorned, unexplained.

STARLINGS ON THE ROOF

"NO smoke spreads out of this chimney-pot,
The people who lived here have left the spot,
And others are coming who knew them not.

"If you listen anon, with an ear intent,
The voices, you'll find, will be different
From the well-known ones of those who went."

"Why did they go? Their tones so bland
Were quite familiar to our band;
The comers we shall not understand."

"They look for a new life, rich and strange;
They do not know that, let them range
Wherever they may, they will get no change.

"They will drag their house-gear ever so far
In their search for a home no miseries mar;
They will find that as they were they are,

"That every hearth has a ghost, alack,
And can be but the scene of a bivouac
Till they move perforce—no time to pack!"

THE MOON LOOKS IN

I

I HAVE risen again,
And awhile survey
By my chilly ray
Through your window-pane
Your upturned face,
As you think, "Ah—she
Now dreams of me
In her distant place!"

II

I pierce her blind
In her far-off home:
She fixes a comb,
And says in her mind,
"I start in an hour;
Whom shall I meet?
Won't the men be sweet,
And the women sour!"

THE SWEET HUSSY

In his early days he was quite surprised
When she told him she was compromised
By meetings and lingerings at his whim,
And thinking not of herself but him;
While she lifted orbs aggrieved and round
That scandal should so soon abound,
(As she had raised them to nine or ten
Of antecedent nice young men):
And in remorse he thought with a sigh,
How good she is, and how bad am I!—
It was years before he understood
That she was the wicked one—he the good.

THE TELEGRAM

"O he's suffering—maybe dying—and I not there to aid,
And smooth his bed and whisper to him! Can I nohow go?
Only the nurse's brief twelve words thus hurriedly conveyed,
As by stealth, to let me know.

"He was the best and brightest!—candour shone upon his brow,
And I shall never meet again a soldier such as he,
And I loved him ere I knew it, and perhaps he's sinking now,
Far, far removed from me!"

—The yachts ride mute at anchor and the fulling moon is fair,
And the giddy folk are strutting up and down the smooth parade,
And in her wild distraction she seems not to be aware
That she lives no more a maid,

But has vowed and wived herself to one who blessed the ground she trod
To and from his scene of ministry, and thought her history known
In its last particular to him—aye, almost as to God,
And believed her quite his own.

So rapt her mind's far-off regard she droops as in a swoon,
And a movement of aversion mars her recent spousal grace,

And in silence we two sit here in our waning honeymoon
At this idle watering-place. . . .

What now I see before me is a long lane overhung
With lovelessness, and stretching from the present to the grave.
And I would I were away from this, with friends I knew when young,
Ere a woman held me slave.

THE MOTH-SIGNAL

(*On Egdon Heath*)

"WHAT are you still, still thinking,"
He asked in vague surmise,
"That you stare at the wick unblinking
With those deep lost luminous eyes?"

"O, I see a poor moth burning
In the candle flame," said she,
"Its wings and legs are turning
To a cinder rapidly."

"Moths fly in from the heather,"
He said, "now the days decline."
"I know," said she. "The weather,
I hope, will at last be fine.

"I think," she added lightly,
"I'll look out at the door.
The ring the moon wears nightly
May be visible now no more."

She rose, and, little heeding,
Her life-mate then went on
With his mute museful reading
In the annals of ages gone.

Outside the house a figure
Came from the tumulus near,
And speedily waxed bigger,
And clasped and called her Dear.

"I saw the pale-winged token
You sent through the crack," sighed she.
"That moth is burnt and broken
With which you lured out me.

"And were I as the moth is
It might be better far
For one whose marriage troth is
Shattered as potsherds are!"

Then grinned the Ancient Briton
From the tumulus treed with pine:
"So, hearts are thwartly smitten
In these days as in mine!"

SEEN BY THE WAITS

THROUGH snowy woods and shady
We went to play a tune
To the lonely manor-lady
By the light of the Christmas moon.

We violed till, upward glancing
To where a mirror leaned,
It showed her airily dancing,
Deeming her movements screened;

Dancing alone in the room there,
Thin-draped in her robe of night;
Her postures, glassed in the gloom there,
Were a strange phantasmal sight.

She had learnt (we heard when homing)
That her roving spouse was dead:
Why she had danced in the gloaming
We thought, but never said.

THE TWO SOLDIERS

JUST at the corner of the wall
  We met—yes, he and I—
Who had not faced in camp or hall
  Since we bade home good-bye,
And what once happened came back—all—
  Out of those years gone by.

And that strange woman whom we knew
  And loved—long dead and gone,
Whose poor half-perished residue,
  Tombless and trod, lay yon!
But at this moment to our view
  Rose like a phantom wan.

And in his fixed face I could see,
  Lit by a lurid shine,
The drama re-enact which she
  Had dyed incarnadine
For us, and more. And doubtless he
  Beheld it too in mine.

A start, as at one slightly known;
  And with an indifferent air
We passed, without a sign being shown
  That, as it real were,
A memory-acted scene had thrown
  Its tragic shadow there.

THE DEATH OF REGRET

I OPENED my shutter at sunrise,
  And looked at the hill hard by,
And I heartily grieved for the comrade
  Who wandered up there to die.

I let in the morn on the morrow,
  And failed not to think of him then,
As he trod up that rise in the twilight,
  And never came down again.

I undid the shutter a week thence,
  But not until after I'd turned
Did I call back his last departure
  By the upland there discerned.

Uncovering the casement long later,
  I bent to my toil till the gray,
When I said to myself, "Ah—what ails me,
  To forget him all the day!"

As daily I flung back the shutter
  In the same blank bald routine,
He scarcely once rose to remembrance
  Through a month of my facing the scene.

And ah, seldom now do I ponder
  At the window as heretofore
On the long valued one who died yonder,
  And wastes by the sycamore.

IN THE DAYS OF CRINOLINE

A PLAIN tilt-bonnet on her head
She took the path across the leaze.
—Her spouse the vicar, gardening, said,
"Too dowdy that, for coquetries,
    So I can hoe at ease."

But when she had passed into the heath,
And gained the wood beyond the flat,
She raised her skirts, and from beneath
Unpinned and drew as from a sheath
    An ostrich-feathered hat.

And where the hat had hung she now
Concealed and pinned the dowdy hood,
And set the hat upon her brow,
And thus emerging from the wood
    Tripped on in jaunty mood.

The sun was low and crimson-faced
As two came that way from the town,

And plunged into the wood untraced. . . .
When severally therefrom they paced
The sun had quite gone down.

The hat and feather disappeared,
The dowdy hood again was donned,
And in the gloom the fair one neared
Her home and husband dour, who conned
Calmly his blue-eyed blonde.

"To-day," he said, "you have shown good sense,
A dress so modest and so meek
Should always deck your goings hence
Alone." And as a recompense
He kissed her on the cheek.

THE ROMAN GRAVEMOUNDS

By Rome's dim relics there walks a man,
Eyes bent; and he carries a basket and spade;
I guess what impels him to scrape and scan;
Yea, his dreams of that Empire long decayed.

"Vast was Rome," he must muse, "in the world's regard,
Vast it looms there still, vast it ever will be";
And he stoops as to dig and unmine some shard
Left by those who are held in such memory.

But no; in his basket, see, he has brought
A little white furred thing, stiff of limb,
Whose life never won from the world a thought;
It is this, and not Rome, that is moving him.

And to make it a grave he has come to the spot,
And he delves in the ancient dead's long home;
Their fames, their achievements, the man knows not;
The furred thing is all to him—nothing Rome!

"Here say you that Cæsar's warriors lie?—
But my little white cat was my only friend!
Could she but live, might the record die
Of Cæsar, his legions, his aims, his end!"

Well, Rome's long rule here is oft and again
A theme for the sages of history,
And the small furred life was worth no one's pen;
Yet its mourner's mood has a charm for me.

November 1910.

THE WORKBOX

"SEE, here's the workbox, little wife,
That I made of polished oak."
He was a joiner, of village life;
She came of borough folk.

He holds the present up to her
As with a smile she nears
And answers to the profferer,
"'Twill last all my sewing years!"

"I warrant it will. And longer too.
'Tis a scantling that I got
Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who
Died of they knew not what.

"The shingled pattern that seems to cease
Against your box's rim
Continues right on in the piece
That's underground with him.

"And while I worked it made me think
Of timber's varied doom;
One inch where people eat and drink,
The next inch in a tomb.

"But why do you look so white, my dear,
And turn aside your face?
You knew not that good lad, I fear,
Though he came from your native place?"

"How could I know that good young man,
Though he came from my native town,
When he must have left far earlier than
I was a woman grown?"

"Ah, no. I should have understood!
It shocked you that I gave
To you one end of a piece of wood
Whose other is in a grave?"

"Don't, dear, despise my intellect,
Mere accidental things
Of that sort never have effect
On my imaginings."

Yet still her lips were limp and wan,
Her face still held aside,
As if she had known not only John,
But known of what he died.

THE SACRILEGE

A BALLAD-TRAGEDY

(*Circa* 182–)

PART I

"I HAVE a Love I love too well
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor;
I have a Love I love too well,
To whom, ere she was mine,
'Such is my love for you,' I said,
'That you shall have to hood your head
A silken kerchief crimson-red,
Wove finest of the fine.'

"And since this Love, for one mad moon,
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,
Since this my Love for one mad moon
Did clasp me as her king,
I snatched a silk-piece red and rare
From off a stall at Priddy Fair,
For handkerchief to hood her hair
When we went gallanting.

"Full soon the four weeks neared their end
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor;

And when the four weeks neared their end,
And their swift sweets outwore,
I said, 'What shall I do to own
Those beauties bright as tulips blown,
And keep you here with me alone
As mine for evermore?'

"And as she drowsed within my van
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor—
And as she drowsed within my van,
And dawning turned to day,
She heavily raised her sloe-back eyes
And murmured back in softest wise,
'One more thing, and the charms you prize
Are yours henceforth for aye.

"'And swear I will I'll never go
While Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor
To meet the Cornish Wrestler Joe
For dance and dallyings.
If you'll to yon cathedral shrine,
And finger from the chest divine
Treasure to buy me ear-drops fine,
And richly jewelled rings.'

"I said: 'I am one who has gathered gear
From Marlbury Downs to Dunkery Tor,
Who has gathered gear for many a year
From mansion, mart and fair;
But at God's house I've stayed my hand,
Hearing within me some command—
Curbed by a law not of the land
From doing damage there!'

"Whereat she pouts, this Love of mine,
As Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor,
And still she pouts, this Love of mine,
So cityward I go.
But ere I start to do the thing,
And speed my soul's imperilling
For one who is my ravishing
And all the joy I know,

"I come to lay this charge on thee—
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor—
I come to lay this charge on thee
With solemn speech and sign:
Should things go ill, and my life pay
For botchery in this rash assay,
You are to take hers likewise—yea,
The month the law takes mine.

"For should my rival, Wrestler Joe,
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor—
My reckless rival, Wrestler Joe,
My Love's possessor be,
My tortured spirit would not rest,
But wander weary and distrest
Throughout the world in wild protest:
The thought nigh maddens me!"

Part II

Thus did he speak—this brother of mine—
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,
Born at my birth of mother of mine,
And forthwith went his way
To dare the deed some coming night . . .
I kept the watch with shaking sight,
The moon at moments breaking bright,
At others glooming gray.

For three full days I heard no sound
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor,
I heard no sound at all around
Whether his fay prevailed,
Or one malign the master were,
Till some afoot did tidings bear
How that, for all his practised care,
He had been caught and jailed.

They had heard a crash when twelve had chimed
By Mendip east of Dunkery Tor,
When twelve had chimed and moonlight climbed;
They watched, and he was tracked
By arch and aisle and saint and knight

Of sculptured stonework sheeted white
In the cathedral's ghostly light,
And captured in the act.

Yes; for this Love he loved too well
Where Dunkery sights the Severn shore,
All for this Love he loved too well
He burst the holy bars,
Seized golden vessels from the chest
To buy her ornaments of the best,
At her ill-witchery's request
And lure of eyes like stars. . . .

When blustering March confused the sky
In Toneborough Town by Exon Moor,
When blustering March confused the sky
They stretched him; and he died.
Down in the crowd where I, to see
The end of him, stood silently,
With a set face he lipped to me—
"Remember." "Ay!" I cried.

By night and day I shadowed her
From Toneborough Deane to Dunkery Tor,
I shadowed her asleep, astir,
And yet I could not bear—
Till Wrestler Joe anon began
To figure as her chosen man,
And took her to his shining van—
To doom a form so fair!

He made it handsome for her sake—
And Dunkery smiled to Exon Moor—
He made it handsome for her sake,
Painting it out and in;
And on the door of apple-green
A bright brass knocker soon was seen,
And window-curtains white and clean
For her to sit within.

And all could see she clave to him
As cleaves a cloud to Dunkery Tor,
Yea, all could see she clave to him,
And every day I said,

"A pity it seems to part those two
That hourly grow to love more true:
Yet she's the wanton woman who
Sent one to swing till dead!"

That blew to blazing all my hate,
While Dunkery frowned on Exon Moor,
And when the river swelled, her fate
Came to her pitilessly. . . .
I dogged her, crying: "Across that plank
They use as bridge to reach yon bank
A coat and hat lie limp and dank;
Your goodman's, can they be?"

She paled, and went, I close behind—
And Exon frowned to Dunkery Tor,
She went, and I came up behind
And tipped the plank that bore
Her, fleetly flitting across to eye
What such might bode. She slid awry;
And from the current came a cry,
A gurgle; and no more.

How that befell no mortal knew
From Marlbury Downs to Exon Moor;
No mortal knew that deed undue
But he who schemed the crime,
Which night still covers. . . . But in dream
Those ropes of hair upon the stream
He sees, and he will hear that scream
Until his judgment-time.

THE ABBEY MASON

INVENTOR OF THE "PERPENDICULAR" STYLE OF GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE

(*With Memories of John Hicks, Architect*)

The new-vamped Abbey shaped apace
In the fourteenth century of grace;

(The church which, at an after date,
Acquired cathedral rank and state.)

Panel and circumscribing wall
Of latest feature, trim and tall,

Rose roundabout the Norman core
In prouder pose than theretofore,

Encasing magically the old
With parpend ashlars manifold.

The trowels rang out, and tracery
Appeared where blanks had used to be.

Men toiled for pleasure more than pay,
And all went smoothly day by day,

Till, in due course, the transept part
Engrossed the master-mason's art.

—Home-coming thence he tossed and turned
Throughout the night till the new sun burned.

"What fearful visions have inspired
These gaingivings?" his wife inquired;

"As if your tools were in your hand
You have hammered, fitted, muttered, planned;

"You have thumped as you were working hard:
I might have found me bruised and scarred.

"What then's amiss. What eating care
Looms nigh, whereof I am unaware?"

He answered not, but churchward went,
Viewing his draughts with discontent;

And fumbled there the livelong day
Till, hollow-eyed, he came away.

—'Twas said, "The master-mason's ill!"
And all the abbey works stood still.

Quoth Abbot Wygmore: "Why, O why
Distress yourself? You'll surely die!"

The mason answered, trouble-torn,
"This long-vogued style is quite outworn!

"The upper archmould nohow serves
To meet the lower tracery curves:

"The ogees bend too far away
To give the flexures interplay.

"This it is causes my distress. . . .
So it will ever be unless

"New forms be found to supersede
The circle when occasions need.

"To carry it out I have tried and toiled,
And now perforce must own me foiled!

"Jeerers will say: 'Here was a man
Who could not end what he began!'"

—So passed that day, the next, the next;
The abbot scanned the task, perplexed;

The townsmen mustered all their wit
To fathom how to compass it,

But no raw artistries availed
Where practice in the craft had failed. . . .

—One night he tossed, all open-eyed,
And early left his helpmeet's side.

Scattering the rushes of the floor
He wandered from the chamber door

And sought the sizing pile, whereon
Struck dimly a cadaverous dawn

Through freezing rain, that drenched the board
Of diagram-lines he last had scored—

Chalked phantasies in vain begot
To knife the architectural knot—

In front of which he dully stood,
Regarding them in hopeless mood.

He closelier looked; then looked again:
The chalk-scratched draught-board faced the rain,

Whose icicled drops deformed the lines
Innumerous of his lame designs,

So that they streamed in small white threads
From the upper segments to the heads

Of arcs below, uniting them
Each by a stalactitic stem.

—At once, with eyes that struck out sparks,
He adds accessory cusping-marks,

Then laughs aloud. The thing was done
So long assayed from sun to sun. . . .

—Now in his joy he grew aware
Of one behind him standing there,

And, turning, saw the abbot, who
The weather's whim was watching too.

Onward to Prime the abbot went,
Tacit upon the incident.

—Men now discerned as days revolved
The ogive riddle had been solved;

Templates were cut, fresh lines were chalked
Where lines had been defaced and balked,

And the work swelled and mounted higher,
Achievement distancing desire;

Here jambs with transoms fixed between,
Where never the like before had been—

There little mullions thinly sawn
Where meeting circles once were drawn.

"We knew," men said, "the thing would go
After his craft-wit got aglow,

"And, once fulfilled what he has designed,
We'll honour him and his great mind!"

When matters stood thus poised awhile,
And all surroundings shed a smile,

The master-mason on an eve
Homed to his wife and seemed to grieve. . . .

—"The abbot spoke to me to-day;
He hangs about the works alway.

"He knows the source as well as I
Of the new style men magnify.

"He said: 'You pride yourself too much
On your creation. Is it such?

"'Surely the hand of God it is
That conjured so, and only His!—

"'Disclosing by the frost and rain
Forms your invention chased in vain;

"'Hence the devices deemed so great
You copied, and did not create.'

"I feel the abbot's words are just,
And that all thanks renounce I must.

"Can a man welcome praise and pelf
For hatching art that hatched itself? . . .

"So, I shall own the deft design
Is Heaven's outshaping, and not mine."

"What!" said she. "Praise your works ensure
To throw away, and quite obscure

"Your beaming and beneficent star?
Better you leave things as they are!

"Why, think awhile. Had not your zest
In your loved craft curtailed your rest—

"Had you not gone there ere the day
The sun had melted all away!"

—But, though his good wife argued so,
The mason let the people know

That not unaided sprang the thought
Whereby the glorious fane was wrought,

But that by frost when dawn was dim
The method was disclosed to him.

"Yet," said the townspeople thereat,
"'Tis your own doing, even with that!"

But he—chafed, childlike, in extremes—
The temperament of men of dreams—

Aloofly scrupled to admit
That he did aught but borrow it,

And diffidently made request
That with the abbot all should rest.

—As none could doubt the abbot's word,
Or question what the church averred,

The mason was at length believed
Of no more count than he conceived,

And soon began to lose the fame
That late had gathered round his name. . . .

—Time passed, and like a living thing
The pile went on embodying,

And workmen died, and young ones grew,
And the old mason sank from view

And Abbots Wygmore and Staunton went
And Horton sped the embellishment.

But not till years had far progressed
Chanced it that, one day, much impressed,

Standing within the well-graced aisle,
He asked who first conceived the style;

And some decrepit sage detailed
How, when invention nought availed,

The cloud-cast waters in their whim
Came down, and gave the hint to him

Who struck each arc, and made each mould;
And how the abbot would not hold

As sole begetter him who applied
Forms the Almighty sent as guide;

And how the master lost renown,
And wore in death no artist's crown.

—Then Horton, who in inner thought
Had more perceptions than he taught,

Replied: "Nay; art can but transmute;
Invention is not absolute;

"Things fail to spring from nought at call,
And art-beginnings most of all.

"He did but what all artists do,
Wait upon Nature for his cue."

—"Had you been here to tell them so,
Lord Abbot, sixty years ago,

"The mason, now long underground,
Doubtless a different fate had found.

"He passed into oblivion dim,
And none knew what became of him!

"His name? 'Twas of some common kind
And now has faded out of mind."

The Abbot: "It shall not be hid!
I'll trace it." . . . But he never did.

—When longer yet dank death had wormed
The brain wherein the style had germed

From Gloucester church it flew afar—
The style called Perpendicular.—

To Winton and to Westminster
It ranged, and grew still beautifuller:

From Solway Frith to Dover Strand
Its fascinations starred the land,

Not only on cathedral walls
But upon courts and castle halls,

Till every edifice in the isle
Was patterned to no other style,

And till, long having played its part
The curtain fell on Gothic art.

—Well: when in Wessex on your rounds,
Take a brief step beyond its bounds,

And enter Gloucester: seek the quoin
Where choir and transept interjoin,

And, gazing at the forms there flung
Against the sky by one unsung—

The ogee arches transom-topped,
The tracery-stalks by spandrels stopped,

Petrified lacework—lightly lined
On ancient massiveness behind—

Muse that some minds so modest be
As to renounce fame's fairest fee,

(Like him who crystallized on this spot
His visionings, but lies forgot,

And many a mediaeval one
Whose symmetries salute the sun)

While others boom a baseless claim,
And upon nothing rear a name.

THE JUBILEE OF A MAGAZINE

(*To the Editor*)

YES; your up-dated modern page—
All flower-fresh, as it appears—
Can claim a time-tried lineage,

That reaches backward fifty years
(Which, if but short for sleepy squires,
Is much in magazines' careers).

—Here, on your cover, never tires
The sower, reaper, thresher, while
As through the seasons of our sires

Each wills to work in ancient style
With seedlip, sickle, share and flail,
Though modes have since moved many a mile!

The steel-roped plough now rips the vale,
With cog and tooth the sheaves are won,
Wired wheels drum out the wheat like hail;

But if we ask, what has been done
To unify the mortal lot
Since your bright leaves first saw the sun,

Beyond mechanic furtherance—what
Advance can rightness, candour, claim?
Truth bends abashed, and answers not.

Despite your volumes' gentle aim
To straighten visions wry and wrong,
Events jar onward much the same!

—Had custom tended to prolong,
As on your golden page engrained,
Old processes of blade and prong,

And best invention been retained
For high crusades to lessen tears
Throughout the race, the world had gained! . .
But too much, this, for fifty years.

THE SATIN SHOES

"If ever I walk to church to wed,
As other maidens use,
And face the gathered eyes," she said,
"I'll go in satin shoes!"

She was as fair as early day
Shining on meads unmown,

And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

The time arrived when it was meet
That she should be a bride;
The satin shoes were on her feet,
Her father was at her side.

They stood within the dairy door,
And gazed across the green;
The church loomed on the distant moor,
But rain was thick between.

"The grass-path hardly can be stepped,
The lane is like a pool!"—
Her dream is shown to be inept,
Her wish they overrule.

"To go forth shod in satin soft
A coach would be required!"
For thickest boots the shoes were doffed—
Those shoes her soul desired. . . .

All day the bride, as overborne,
Was seen to brood apart,
And that the shoes had not been worn
Sat heavy on her heart.

From her wrecked dream, as months flew on,
Her thought seemed not to range.
"What ails the wife," they said anon,
"That she should be so strange?" . . .

Ah—what coach comes with furtive glide—
A coach of closed-up kind?
It comes to fetch the last year's bride,
Who wanders in her mind.

She strove with them, and fearfully ran
Stairward with one low scream:
"Nay—coax her," said the madhouse man,
"With some old household theme."

"If you will go, dear, you must fain
Put on those shoes—the pair
Meant for your marriage, which the rain
Forbade you then to wear."

She clapped her hands, flushed joyous hues;
"O yes—I'll up and ride
If I am to wear my satin shoes
And be a proper bride!"

Out then her little foot held she,
As to depart with speed;
The madhouse man smiled pleasantly
To see the wile succeed.

She turned to him when all was done,
And gave him her thin hand,
Exclaiming like an enraptured one,
"This time it will be grand!"

She mounted with a face elate,
Shut was the carriage door;
They drove her to the madhouse gate,
And she was seen no more. . . .

Yet she was fair as early day
Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

EXEUNT OMNES

I

EVERYBODY else, then, going,
And I still left where the fair was? . . .
Much have I seen of neighbour loungers
Making a lusty showing,
Each now past all knowing.

II

There is an air of blankness
In the street and the littered spaces;
Thoroughfare, steeple, bridge and highway
Wizen themselves to lankness;
Kennels dribble dankness.

III

Folk all fade. And whither,
As I wait alone where the fair was?
Into the clammy and numbing night-fog
Whence they entered hither.
Soon do I follow thither!

June 2, 1913.

A POET

ATTENTIVE eyes, fantastic heed,
Assessing minds, he does not need,
Nor urgent writs to sup or dine,
Nor pledges in the rosy wine.

For loud acclaim he does not care
By the august or rich or fair,
Nor for smart pilgrims from afar,
Curious on where his hauntings are.

But soon or later, when you hear
That he has doffed this wrinkled gear,
Some evening, at the first star-ray,
Come to his graveside, pause and say:

"Whatever his message—glad or grim—
Two bright-souled women clave to him";
Stand and say that while day decays;
It will be word enough of praise.

July 1914.

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

IN FIFTEEN GLIMPSES

(*First published April* 1911)

I

AT TEA

THE kettle descants in a cosy drone,
And the young wife looks in her husband's face,
And then at her guest's, and shows in her own
Her sense that she fills an envied place;
And the visiting lady is all abloom,
And says there was never so sweet a room.

And the happy young housewife does not know
That the woman beside her was first his choice,
Till the fates ordained it could not be so. . . .
Betraying nothing in look or voice
The guest sits smiling and sips her tea,
And he throws her a stray glance yearningly.

II

IN CHURCH

"AND now to God the Father," he ends,
And his voice thrills up to the topmost tiles:
Each listener chokes as he bows and bends,
And emotion pervades the crowded aisles.

Then the preacher glides to the vestry-door,
And shuts it, and thinks he is seen no more.

The door swings softly ajar meanwhile,
And a pupil of his in the Bible class,
Who adores him as one without gloss or guile,
Sees her idol stand with a satisfied smile
And re-enact at the vestry-glass
Each pulpit gesture in deft dumb-show
That had moved the congregation so.

III

BY HER AUNT'S GRAVE

"SIXPENCE a week," says the girl to her lover,
"Aunt used to bring me, for she could confide
In me alone, she vowed. 'Twas to cover
The cost of her headstone when she died.
And that was a year ago last June;
I've not yet fixed it. But I must soon."

"And where is the money now, my dear?"
"O, snug in my purse . . . Aunt was *so* slow
In saving it—eighty weeks, or near." . . .
"Let's spend it," he hints. "For she won't know.
There's a dance to-night at the Load of Hay."
She passively nods. And they go that way.

IV

IN THE ROOM OF THE BRIDE-ELECT

"WOULD it had been the man of our wish!"
Sighs her mother. To whom with vehemence she
In the wedding-dress—the wife to be—
"Then why were you so mollyish
As not to insist on him for me!"
The mother, amazed: "Why, dearest one,
Because you pleaded for this or none!"

"But Father and you should have stood out strong!
Since then, to my cost, I have lived to find
That you were right and that I was wrong;
This man is a dolt to the one declined. . . .
Ah!—here he comes with his button-hole rose.
Good God—I must marry him I suppose!"

V

AT A WATERING-PLACE

THEY sit and smoke on the esplanade,
The man and his friend, and regard the bay
Where the far chalk cliffs, to the left displayed,
Smile sallowly in the decline of day.
And saunterers pass with laugh and jest—
A handsome couple among the rest.

"That smart proud pair," says the man to his friend,
"Are to marry next week. . . . How little he thinks
That dozens of days and nights on end
I have stroked her neck, unhooked the links
Of her sleeve to get at her upper arm. . . .
Well, bliss is in ignorance: what's the harm!"

VI

IN THE CEMETERY

"YOU see those mothers squabbling there?"
Remarks the man of the cemetery.
"One says in tears, '*'Tis mine lies here!*'
Another, '*Nay, mine, you Pharisee!*'
Another, '*How dare you move my flowers*
And put your own on this grave of ours!'
But all their children were laid therein
At different times, like sprats in a tin.

"And then the main drain had to cross,
And we moved the lot some nights ago,

And packed them away in the general foss
With hundreds more. But their folks don't know,
And as well cry over a new-laid drain
As anything else, to ease your pain!"

VII

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

"My stick!" he says, and turns in the lane
To the house just left, whence a vixen voice
Comes out with the firelight through the pane,
And he sees within that the girl of his choice
Stands rating her mother with eyes aglare
For something said while he was there.

"At last I behold her soul undraped!"
Thinks the man who had loved her more than himself;
"My God!—'tis but narrowly I have escaped.—
My precious porcelain proves it delf."
His face has reddened like one ashamed,
And he steals off, leaving his stick unclaimed.

VIII

IN THE STUDY

He enters, and mute on the edge of a chair
Sits a thin-faced lady, a stranger there,
A type of decayed gentility;
And by some small signs he well can guess
That she comes to him almost breakfastless.

"I have called—I hope I do not err—
I am looking for a purchaser
Of some score volumes of the works
Of eminent divines I own,—
Left by my father—though it irks
My patience to offer them." And she smiles

As if necessity were unknown;
"But the truth of it is that oftenwhiles
I have wished, as I am fond of art,
To make my rooms a little smart,
And these old books are so in the way."
And lightly still she laughs to him,
As if to sell were a mere gay whim,
And that, to be frank, Life were indeed
To her not vinegar and gall,
But fresh and honey-like; and Need
No household skeleton at all.

IX

AT THE ALTAR-RAIL

"My bride is not coming, alas!" says the groom,
And the telegram shakes in his hand. "I own
It was hurried! We met at a dancing-room
When I went to the Cattle-Show alone,
And then, next night, where the Fountain leaps,
And the Street of the Quarter-Circle sweeps.

"Ay, she won me to ask her to be my wife—
'Twas foolish perhaps!—to forsake the ways
Of the flaring town for a farmer's life.
She agreed. And we fixed it. Now she says:
'*It's sweet of you, dear, to prepare me a nest,*
But a swift, short, gay life suits me best.
What I really am you have never gleaned;
I had eaten the apple ere you were weaned.'"

X

IN THE NUPTIAL CHAMBER

"O THAT mastering tune?" And up in the bed
Like a lace-robed phantom springs the bride;
"And why?" asks the man she had that day wed,
With a start, as the band plays on outside.

"It's the townsfolk's cheery compliment
Because of our marriage, my Innocent."

"O but you don't know! 'Tis the passionate air
To which my old Love waltzed with me,
And I swore as we spun that none should share
My home, my kisses, till death, save he!
And he dominates me and thrills me through,
And it's he I embrace while embracing you!"

XI

IN THE RESTAURANT

"BUT hear. If you stay, and the child be born,
It will pass as your husband's with the rest,
While, if we fly, the teeth of scorn
Will be gleaming at us from east to west;
And the child will come as a life despised;
I feel an elopement is ill-advised!"

"O you realize not what it is, my dear,
To a woman! Daily and hourly alarms
Lest the truth should out. How can I stay here,
And nightly take him into my arms!
Come to the child no name or fame,
Let us go, and face it, and bear the shame."

XII

AT THE DRAPER'S

"I STOOD at the back of the shop, my dear,
    But you did not perceive me.
Well, when they deliver what you were shown
    I shall know nothing of it, believe me!"

And he coughed and coughed as she paled and said,
    "O, I didn't see you come in there—
Why couldn't you speak?"—"Well, I didn't. I left
    That you should not notice I'd been there.

"You were viewing some lovely things. '*Soon required*
For a widow, of latest fashion';
And I knew 'twould upset you to meet the man
Who had to be cold and ashen

"And screwed in a box before they could dress you
'*In the last new note in mourning*,'
As they defined it. So, not to distress you,
I left you to your adorning."

XIII

ON THE DEATH-BED

"I'LL tell—being past all praying for—
Then promptly die . . . He was out at the war.
And got some scent of the intimacy
That was under way between her and me;
And he stole back home, and appeared like a ghost
One night, at the very time almost
That I reached her house. Well, I shot him dead,
And secretly buried him. Nothing was said.

"The news of the battle came next day;
He was scheduled missing. I hurried away,
Got out there, visited the field,
And sent home word that a search revealed
He was one of the slain; though, lying alone
And stript, his body had not been known.

"But she suspected. I lost her love,
Yea, my hope of earth, and of Heaven above;
And my time's now come, and I'll pay the score,
Though it be burning for evermore."

XIV

OVER THE COFFIN

THEY stand confronting, the coffin between,
His wife of old, and his wife of late,
And the dead man whose they both had been
Seems listening aloof, as to things past date.
—"I have called," says the first. "Do you marvel or not?"
"In truth," says the second, "I do—somewhat."

"Well, there was a word to be said by me! . . .
I divorced that man because of you—
It seemed I must do it, boundenly;
But now I am older, and tell you true,
For life is little, and dead lies he;
I would I had let alone you two!
And both of us, scorning parochial ways,
Had lived like the wives in the patriarchs' days."

XV

IN THE MOONLIGHT

"O LONELY workman, standing there
In a dream, why do you stare and stare
At her grave, as no other grave there were?

"If your great gaunt eyes so importune
Her soul by the shine of this corpse-cold moon,
Maybe you'll raise her phantom soon!"

"Why, fool, it is what I would rather see
Than all the living folk there be;
But alas, there is no such joy for me!"

"Ah—she was one you loved, no doubt,
Through good and evil, through rain and drought,
And when she passed, all your sun went out?"

"Nay: she was the woman I did not love,
Whom all the others were ranked above,
Whom during her life I thought nothing of."

MOMENTS OF VISION

AND MISCELLANEOUS VERSES

MOMENTS OF VISION

THAT mirror
Which makes of men a transparency,
Who holds that mirror
And bids us such a breast-bared spectacle see
Of you and me?

That mirror
Whose magic penetrates like a dart,
Who lifts that mirror
And throws our mind back on us, and our heart,
Until we start?

That mirror
Works well in these night hours of ache;
Why in that mirror
Are tincts we never see ourselves once take
When the world is awake?

That mirror
Can test each mortal when unaware;
Yea, that strange mirror
May catch his last thoughts, whole life foul or fair,
Glassing it—where?

THE VOICE OF THINGS

FORTY Augusts—aye, and several more—ago,
When I paced the headlands loosed from dull employ,
The waves huzza'd like a multitude below,
In the sway of an all-including joy
Without cloy.

Blankly I walked there a double decade after,
When thwarts had flung their toils in front of me,
And I heard the waters wagging in a long ironic laughter
At the lot of men, and all the vapoury
Things that be.

Wheeling change has set me again standing where
Once I heard the waves huzza at Lammas-tide;
But they supplicate now—like a congregation there
Who murmur the Confession—I outside,
Prayer denied.

"WHY BE AT PAINS?"

(Wooer's Song)

Why be at pains that I should know
You sought not me?
Do breezes, then, make features glow
So rosily?
Come, the lit port is at our back,
And the tumbling sea;
Elsewhere the lampless uphill track
To uncertainty!

O should not we two waifs join hands?
I am alone,
You would enrich me more than lands
By being my own.
Yet, though this facile moment flies,
Close is your tone,
And ere to-morrow's dewfall dries
I plough the unknown.

"WE SAT AT THE WINDOW"

(Bournemouth, 1875)

We sat at the window looking out,
And the rain came down like silken strings
That Swithin's day. Each gutter and spout
Babbled unchecked in the busy way
Of witless things:

Nothing to read, nothing to see
Seemed in that room for her and me
On Swithin's day.

We were irked by the scene, by our own selves; yes,
For I did not know, nor did she infer
How much there was to read and guess
By her in me, and to see and crown
By me in her.
Wasted were two souls in their prime,
And great was the waste, that July time
When the rain came down.

AFTERNOON SERVICE AT MELLSTOCK

(*Circa* 1850)

On afternoons of drowsy calm
We stood in the panelled pew,
Singing one-voiced a Tate-and-Brady psalm
To the tune of "Cambridge New."

We watched the elms, we watched the rooks,
The clouds upon the breeze,
Between the whiles of glancing at our books,
And swaying like the trees.

So mindless were those outpourings!—
Though I am not aware
That I have gained by subtle thought on things
Since we stood psalming there.

AT THE WICKET-GATE

There floated the sounds of church-chiming,
But no one was nigh,
Till there came, as a break in the loneness,
Her father, she, I.

And we slowly moved on to the wicket,
      And downlooking stood,
Till anon people passed, and amid them
      We parted for good.

Greater, wiser, may part there than we three
      Who parted there then,
But never will Fates colder-featured
      Hold sway there again.
Of the churchgoers through the still meadows
      No single one knew
What a play was played under their eyes there
      As thence we withdrew.

IN A MUSEUM

I

Here's the mould of a musical bird long passed from light,
Which over the earth before man came was winging;
There's a contralto voice I heard last night,
That lodges in me still with its sweet singing.

II

Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending
Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I heard,
In the full-fugued song of the universe unending.

Exeter.

APOSTROPHE TO AN OLD PSALM TUNE

I met you first—ah, when did I first meet you?
When I was full of wonder, and innocent,
Standing meek-eyed with those of choric bent,
      While dimming day grew dimmer
         In the pulpit-glimmer.

Much riper in years I met you—in a temple
Where summer sunset streamed upon our shapes,

And you spread over me like a gauze that drapes,
    And flapped from floor to rafters,
        Sweet as angels' laughters.

But you had been stripped of some of your old vesture
By Monk, or another. Now you wore no frill,
And at first you startled me. But I knew you still,
    Though I missed the minim's waver,
        And the dotted quaver.

I grew accustomed to you thus. And you hailed me
Through one who evoked you often. Then at last
Your raiser was borne off, and I mourned you had passed
    From my life with your late outsetter;
        Till I said, "'Tis better!"

But you waylaid me. I rose and went as a ghost goes,
And said, eyes-full: "I'll never hear it again!
It is overmuch for scathed and memoried men
    When sitting among strange people
        Under their steeple."

Now, a new stirrer of tones calls you up before me
And wakes your speech, as she of Endor did
(When sought by Saul who, in disguises hid,
    Fell down on the earth to hear it)
        Samuel's spirit.

So, your quired oracles beat till they make me tremble
As I discern your mien in the old attire,
Here in these turmoiled years of belligerent fire
    Living still on—and onward, maybe,
        Till Doom's great day be!

Sunday, August 13, 1916.

AT THE WORD "FAREWELL"

SHE looked like a bird from a cloud
    On the clammy lawn,
Moving alone, bare-browed
    In the dim of dawn,.

The candles alight in the room
For my parting meal
Made all things withoutdoors loom
Strange, ghostly, unreal.

The hour itself was a ghost,
And it seemed to me then
As of chances the chance furthermost
I should see her again.
I beheld not where all was so fleet
That a Plan of the past
Which had ruled us from birthtime to meet
Was in working at last:

No prelude did I there perceive
To a drama at all,
Or foreshadow what fortune might weave
From beginnings so small;
But I rose as if quicked by a spur
I was bound to obey,
And stepped through the casement to her
Still alone in the gray.

"I am leaving you. . . . Farewell!" I said,
As I followed her on
By an alley bare boughs overspread;
"I soon must be gone!"
Even then the scale might have been turned
Against love by a feather,
—But crimson one cheek of hers burned
When we came in together.

FIRST SIGHT OF HER AND AFTER

A DAY is drawing to its fall
I had not dreamed to see;
The first of many to enthrall
My spirit, will it be?
Or is this eve the end of all
Such new delight for me?

I journey home: the pattern grows
Of moonshades on the way:
"Soon the first quarter, I suppose,"
Sky-glancing travellers say;
I realize that it, for those,
Has been a common day.

THE RIVAL

I DETERMINED to find out whose it was—
The portrait he looked at so, and sighed;
Bitterly have I rued my meanness
And wept for it since he died!

I searched his desk when he was away,
And there was the likeness—yes, my own!
Taken when I was the season's fairest,
And time-lines all unknown.

I smiled at my image, and put it back,
And he went on cherishing it, until
I was chafed that he loved not the me then living,
But that past woman still.

Well, such was my jealousy at last,
I destroyed that face of the former me;
Could you ever have dreamed the heart of woman
Would work so foolishly!

HEREDITY

I AM the family face;
Flesh perishes, I live on,
Projecting trait and trace
Through time to times anon,
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.

The years-heired feature that can
In curve and voice and eye

Despise the human span
Of durance—that is I;
The eternal thing in man,
That heeds no call to die.

"YOU WERE THE SORT THAT MEN FORGET"

You were the sort that men forget;
Though I—not yet!—
Perhaps not ever. Your slighted weakness
Adds to the strength of my regret!

You'd not the art—you never had
For good or bad—
To make men see how sweet your meaning,
Which, visible, had charmed them glad.

You would, by words inept let fall,
Offend them all,
Even if they saw your warm devotion
Would hold your life's blood at their call.

You lacked the eye to understand
Those friends offhand
Whose mode was crude, though whose dim purport
Outpriced the courtesies of the bland.

I am now the only being who
Remembers you
It may be. What a waste that Nature
Grudged soul so dear the art its due!

SHE, I, AND THEY

I WAS sitting,
She was knitting,
And the portraits of our fore-folk hung around;
When there struck on us a sigh;
"Ah—what is that?" said I:
"Was it not you?" said she. "A sigh did sound."

I had not breathed it,
Nor the night-wind heaved it,
And how it came to us we could not guess;
And we looked up at each face
Framed and glazed there in its place,
Still hearkening; but thenceforth was silentness.

Half in dreaming,
"Then its meaning,"
Said we, "must be surely this; that they repine
That we should be the last
Of stocks once unsurpassed,
And unable to keep up their sturdy line."

1916.

NEAR LANIVET, 1872

THERE was a stunted handpost just on the crest,
Only a few feet high:
She was tired, and we stopped in the twilight-time for her rest,
At the crossways close thereby.

She leant back, being so weary, against its stem,
And laid her arms on its own,
Each open palm stretched out to each end of them,
Her sad face sideways thrown.

Her white-clothed form at this dim-lit cease of day
Made her look as one crucified
In my gaze at her from the midst of the dusty way,
And hurriedly "Don't," I cried.

I do not think she heard. Loosing thence she said,
As she stepped forth ready to go,
"I am rested now.—Something strange came into my head;
I wish I had not leant so!"

And wordless we moved onward down from the hill
In the west cloud's murked obscure,
And looking back we could see the handpost still
In the solitude of the moor.

"It struck her too," I thought, for as if afraid
She heavily breathed as we trailed;
Till she said, "I did not think how 'twould look in the shade,
When I leant there like one nailed."

I, lightly: "There's nothing in it. For *you*, anyhow!"
—"O I know there is not," said she . . .
"Yet I wonder . . . If no one is bodily crucified now,
In spirit one may be!"

And we dragged on and on, while we seemed to see
In the running of Time's far glass
Her crucified, as she had wondered if she might be
Some day.—Alas, alas!

JOYS OF MEMORY

WHEN the spring comes round, and a certain day
Looks out from the brume by the eastern copsetrees
And says, Remember,
I begin again, as if it were new,
A day of like date I once lived through,
Whiling it hour by hour away;
So shall I do till my December,
When spring comes round.

I take my holiday then and my rest
Away from the dun life here about me,
Old hours re-greeting
With the quiet sense that bring they must
Such throbs as at first, till I house with dust,
And in the numbness my heartsome zest
For things that were, be past repeating
When spring comes round.

TO THE MOON

"WHAT have you looked at, Moon,
In your time,
Now long past your prime?"
"O, I have looked at, often looked at
Sweet, sublime,

Sore things, shudderful, night and noon
In my time."

"What have you mused on, Moon,
In your day,
So aloof, so far away?"
"O, I have mused on, often mused on
Growth, decay,
Nations alive, dead, mad, aswoon,
In my day!"

"Have you much wondered, Moon,
On your rounds,
Self-wrapt, beyond Earth's bounds?"
"Yea, I have wondered, often wondered
At the sounds
Reaching me of the human tune
On my rounds."

"What do you think of it, Moon,
As you go?
Is Life much, or no?"
"O, I think of it, often think of it
As a show
God ought surely to shut up soon,
As I go."

COPYING ARCHITECTURE IN AN OLD MINSTER

(*Wimborne*)

How smartly the quarters of the hour march by
That the jack-o'-clock never forgets;
Ding-dong; and before I have traced a cusp's eye,
Or got the true twist of the ogee over,
A double ding-dong ricochetts.

Just so did he clang here before I came,
And so will he clang when I'm gone
Through the Minster's cavernous hollows—the same
Tale of hours never more to be will he deliver
To the speechless midnight and dawn!

I grow to conceive it a call to ghosts,
Whose mould lies below and around.
Yes; the next "Come, come," draws them out from their posts,
And they gather, and one shade appears, and another,
As the eve-damps creep from the ground.

See—a Courtenay stands by his quatre-foiled tomb,
And a Duke and his Duchess near;
And one Sir Edmund in columned gloom,
And a Saxon king by the presbytery chamber;
And shapes unknown in the rear.

Maybe they have met for a parle on some plan
To better ail-stricken mankind;
I catch their cheepings, though thinner than
The overhead creak of a passager's pinion
When leaving land behind.

Or perhaps they speak to the yet unborn,
And caution them not to come
To a world so ancient and trouble-torn,
Of foiled intents, vain lovingkindness,
And ardours chilled and numb.

They waste to fog as I stir and stand,
And move from the arched recess,
And pick up the drawing that slipped from my hand,
And feel for the pencil I dropped in the cranny
In a moment's forgetfulness.

TO SHAKESPEARE

AFTER THREE HUNDRED YEARS

BRIGHT baffling Soul, least capturable of themes,
Thou, who display'dst a life of commonplace,
Leaving no intimate word or personal trace
Of high design outside the artistry
Of thy penned dreams,
Still shalt remain at heart unread eternally.

Through human orbits thy discourse to-day,
Despite thy formal pilgrimage, throbs on

In harmonies that cow Oblivion,
And, like the wind, with all-uncared effect
Maintain a sway
Not fore-desired, in tracks unchosen and unchecked.

And yet, at thy last breath, with mindless note
The borough clocks but samely tongued the hour,
The Avon just as always glassed the tower,
Thy age was published on thy passing-bell
But in due rote
With other dwellers' deaths accorded a like knell.

And at the strokes some townsman (met, maybe,
And thereon queried by some squire's good dame
Driving in shopward) may have given thy name,
With, "Yes, a worthy man and well-to-do;
Though, as for me,
I knew him but by just a neighbour's nod, 'tis true.

"I' faith, few knew him much here, save by word,
He having elsewhere led his busier life;
Though to be sure he left with us his wife."
—"Ah, one of the tradesmen's sons, I now recall. . . .
Witty, I've heard. . . .
We did not know him. . . . Well, good-day. Death comes to all."

So, like a strange bright bird we sometimes find
To mingle with the barn-door brood awhile,
Then vanish from their homely domicile—
Into man's poesy, we wot not whence,
Flew thy strange mind,
Lodged there a radiant guest, and sped for ever thence.

1916.

QUID HIC AGIS?

I

When I weekly knew
An ancient pew,
And murmured there
The forms of prayer

And thanks and praise
In the ancient ways,
And heard read out
During August drought
That chapter from Kings
Harvest-time brings;
—How the prophet, broken
By griefs unspoken,
Went heavily away
To fast and to pray,
And, while waiting to die,
The Lord passed by,
And a whirlwind and fire
Drew nigher and nigher,
And a small voice anon
Bade him up and be gone,—
I did not apprehend
As I sat to the end
And watched for her smile
Across the sunned aisle,
That this theme of a seer
Which came once a year
Might, when sands were heaping,
Be like a sweat creeping,
Or in any degree
Bear on her or on me!

II

When later, by chance
Of circumstance,
It befel me to read
On a hot afternoon
At the lectern there
The selfsame words
As the lesson decreed,
To the gathered few
From the hamlets near—
Folk of flocks and herds
Sitting half aswoon,
Who listened thereto
As women and men
Not overmuch

Concerned at such—
So, like them then,
I did not see
What drought might be
With me, with her,
As the Kalendar
Moved on, and Time
Devoured our prime.

III

But now, at last,
When our glory has passed,
And there is no smile
From her in the aisle,
But where it once shone
A marble, men say,
With her name thereon
Is discerned to-day;
And spiritless
In the wilderness
I shrink from sight
And desire the night,
(Though, as in old wise,
I might still arise,
Go forth, and stand
And prophesy in the land),
I feel the shake
Of wind and earthquake,
And consuming fire
Nigher and nigher,
And the voice catch clear,
"What doest thou here?"

The Spectator: 1916.

ON A MIDSUMMER EVE

I IDLY cut a parsley stalk,
And blew therein towards the moon;
I had not thought what ghosts would walk
With shivering footsteps to my tune.

I went, and knelt, and scooped my hand
As if to drink, into the brook,
And a faint figure seemed to stand
Above me, with the bygone look.

I lipped rough rhymes of chance, not choice,
I thought not what my words might be;
There came into my ear a voice
That turned a tenderer verse for me.

TIMING HER

(*Written to an old folk-tune*)

LALAGE'S coming:
Where is she now, O?
Turning to bow, O,
And smile, is she,
Just at parting,
Parting, parting,
As she is starting
To come to me?

Where is she now, O,
Now, and now, O,
Shadowing a bough, O,
Of hedge or tree
As she is rushing,
Rushing, rushing,
Gossamers brushing
To come to me?

Lalage's coming;
Where is she now, O;
Climbing the brow, O,
Of hills I see?
Yes, she is nearing,
Nearing, nearing,
Weather unfearing
To come to me.

Near is she now, O,
Now, and now, O;
Milk the rich cow, O,
Forward the tea;
Shake the down bed for her,
Linen sheets spread for her,
Drape round the head for her
Coming to me.

Lalage's coming,
Nearer is she now, O,
End anyhow, O,
To-day's husbandry!
Would a gilt chair were mine,
Slippers of vair were mine,
Brushes for hair were mine
Of ivory!

What will she think, O,
She who's so comely,
Viewing how homely
A sort are we!
Nothing resplendent,
No prompt attendant,
Not one dependent
Pertaining to me!

Lalage's coming;
Where is she now, O?
Fain I'd avow, O,
Full honestly
Nought here's enough for her,
All is too rough for her,
Even my love for her
Poor in degree.

Nearer is she now, O,
Now, and now, O,
She it is, I vow, O,
Passing the lea.
Rush down to meet her there,
Call out and greet her there,

Never a sweeter there
Crossed to me!

Lalage's come; aye,
Come is she now, O! . . .
Does Heaven allow, O,
A meeting to be?
Yes, she is here now,
Here now, here now,
Nothing to fear now,
Here's Lalage!

BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

When I walked roseless tracks and wide,
Ere dawned your date for meeting me,
O why did you not cry Halloo
Across the stretch between, and say:

"We move, while years as yet divide,
On closing lines which—though it be
You know me not nor I know you—
Will intersect and join some day!"

Then well I had borne
Each scraping thorn;
But the winters froze,
And grew no rose;
No bridge bestrode
The gap at all;
No shape you showed,
And I heard no call!

THE BLINDED BIRD

So zestfully canst thou sing?
And all this indignity,
With God's consent, on thee!
Blinded ere yet a-wing
By the red-hot needle thou,

I stand and wonder how
So zestfully thou canst sing!

Resenting not such wrong,
Thy grievous pain forgot,
Eternal dark thy lot,
Groping thy whole life long,
After that stab of fire;
Enjailed in pitiless wire;
Resenting not such wrong!

Who hath charity? This bird.
Who suffereth long and is kind,
Is not provoked, though blind
And alive ensepulchred?
Who hopeth, endureth all things?
Who thinketh no evil, but sings?
Who is divine? This bird.

"THE WIND BLEW WORDS"

THE wind blew words along the skies,
And these it blew to me
Through the wide dusk: "Lift up your eyes,
Behold this troubled tree,
Complaining as it sways and plies;
It is a limb of thee.

"Yea, too, the creatures sheltering round—
Dumb figures, wild and tame,
Yea, too, thy fellows who abound—
Either of speech the same
Or far and strange—black, dwarfed, and browned,
They are stuff of thy own frame."

I moved on in a surging awe
Of inarticulateness
At the pathetic Me I saw
In all his huge distress,
Making self-slaughter of the law
To kill, break, or suppress.

THE FADED FACE

How was this I did not see
Such a look as here was shown
Ere its womanhood had blown
Past its first felicity?—
That I did not know you young,
    Faded Face,
        Know you young!

Why did Time so ill bestead
That I heard no voice of yours
Hail from out the curved contours
Of those lips when rosy red;
Listed not the songs they sung,
    Faded Face,
        Songs they sung!

By these blanchings, blooms of old,
And the relics of your voice—
Leavings rare of rich and choice
From your early tone and mould—
Let me mourn,—aye, sorrow-wrung,
    Faded Face,
        Sorrow-wrung!

THE RIDDLE

I

STRETCHING eyes west
Over the sea,
Wind foul or fair,
Always stood she
Prospect-impressed;
Solely out there
Did her gaze rest,
Never elsewhere
Seemed charm to be.

II

Always eyes east
Ponders she now—
As in devotion—
Hills of blank brow
Where no waves plough.
Never the least
Room for emotion
Drawn from the ocean
Does she allow.

THE DUEL

"I AM here to time, you see;
The glade is well-screened—eh?—against alarm;
Fit place to vindicate by my arm
The honour of my spotless wife,
Who scorns your libel upon her life
In boasting intimacy!

"'All hush-offerings you'll spurn,
My husband. Two must come; one only go,'
She said. 'That he'll be you I know;
To faith like ours Heaven will be just,
And I shall abide in fullest trust
Your speedy glad return.'"

"Good. Here am also I;
And we'll proceed without more waste of words
To warm your cockpit. Of the swords
Take you your choice. I shall thereby
Feel that on me no blame can lie,
Whatever Fate accords."

So stripped they there, and fought,
And the swords clicked and scraped, and the onsets sped;
Till the husband fell; and his shirt was red
With streams from his heart's hot cistern. Nought
Could save him now; and the other, wrought
Maybe to pity, said:

"Why did you urge on this?
Your wife assured you; and 't had better been
That you had let things pass, serene
In confidence of long-tried bliss,
Holding there could be nought amiss
In what my words might mean."

Then, seeing nor ruth nor rage
Could move his foeman more—now Death's deaf thrall-
He wiped his steel, and, with a call
Like turtledove to dove, swift broke
Into the copse, where under an oak
His horse cropt, held by a page.

"All's over, Sweet," he cried
To the wife, thus guised; for the young page was she.
"'Tis as we hoped and said 't would be.
He never guessed. . . . We mount and ride
To where our love can reign uneyed.
He's clay, and we are free."

AT MAYFAIR LODGINGS

How could I be aware,
The opposite window eyeing
As I lay listless there,
That through its blinds was dying
One I had rated rare
Before I had set me sighing
For another more fair?

Had the house-front been glass,
My vision unobscuring,
Could aught have come to pass
More happiness-insuring
To her, loved as a lass
When spouseless, all-alluring?
I reckon not, alas!

So, the square window stood,
Steadily night-long shining
In my close neighbourhood,

Who looked forth undivining
That soon would go for good
One there in pain reclining,
Unpardoned, unadieu'd.

Silently screened from view
Her tragedy was ending
That need not have come due
Had she been less unbending.
How near, near were we two
At that last vital rending,—
And neither of us knew!

TO MY FATHER'S VIOLIN

Does he want you down there
In the Nether Glooms where
The hours may be a dragging load upon him,
As he hears the axle grind
Round and round
Of the great world, in the blind
Still profound
Of the night-time? He might liven at the sound
Of your string, revealing you had not forgone him.

In the gallery west the nave,
But a few yards from his grave,
Did you, tucked beneath his chin, to his bowing
Guide the homely harmony
Of the quire
Who for long years strenuously—
Son and sire—
Caught the strains that at his fingering low or higher
From your four thin threads and eff-holes came outflowing.

And, too, what merry tunes
He would bow at nights or noons
That chanced to find him bent to lute a measure,
When he made you speak his heart
As in dream,

Without book or music-chart,
On some theme
Elusive as a jack-o'-lanthorn's gleam,
And the psalm of duty shelved for trill of pleasure.

Well, you can not, alas,
The barrier overpass
That screens him in those Mournful Meads hereunder,
Where no fiddling can be heard
In the glades
Of silentness, no bird
Thrills the shades;
Where no viol is touched for songs or serenades,
No bowing wakes a congregation's wonder.

He must do without you now,
Stir you no more anyhow
To yearning concords taught you in your glory;
While, your strings a tangled wreck,
Once smart drawn,
Ten worm-wounds in your neck,
Purflings wan
With dust-hoar, here alone I sadly con
Your present dumbness, shape your olden story.

1916.

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

THIS statue of Liberty, busy man,
Here erect in the city square,
I have watched while your scrubbings, this early morning,
Strangely wistful,
And half tristful,
Have turned her from foul to fair;

With your bucket of water, and mop, and brush,
Bringing her out of the grime
That has smeared her during the smokes of winter
With such glumness
In her dumbness,
And aged her before her time.

You have washed her down with motherly care—
Head, shoulders, arm, and foot,
To the very hem of the robes that drape her—
All expertly
And alertly,
Till a long stream, black with soot,

Flows over the pavement to the road,
And her shape looms pure as snow:
I read you are hired by the City guardians—
May be yearly,
Or once merely—
To treat the statues so?

"Oh, I'm not hired by the Councilmen
To cleanse the statues here.
I do this one as a self-willed duty,
Not as paid to,
Or at all made to,
But because the doing is dear."

Ah, then I hail you brother and friend!
Liberty's knight divine.
What you have done would have been my doing,
Yea, most verily,
Well, and thoroughly,
Had but your courage been mine!

"Oh I care not for Liberty's mould,
Liberty charms not me;
What's Freedom but an idler's vision,
Vain, pernicious,
Often vicious,
Of things that cannot be!

"Memory it is that brings me to this—
Of a daughter—my one sweet own.
She grew a famous carver's model,
One of the fairest
And of the rarest:—
She sat for the figure as shown.

"But alas, she died in this distant place
Before I was warned to betake

Myself to her side! . . . And in love of my darling,
In love of the fame of her,
And the good name of her,
I do this for her sake."

Answer I gave not. Of that form
The carver was I at his side;
His child, my model, held so saintly,
Grand in feature,
Gross in nature,
In the dens of vice had died.

THE BACKGROUND AND THE FIGURE

(Lover's Ditty)

I THINK of the slope where the rabbits fed,
Of the periwinks' rockwork lair,
Of the fuchsias ringing their bells of red—
And the something else seen there.

Between the blooms where the sod basked bright,
By the bobbing fuchsia trees,
Was another and yet more eyesome sight—
The sight that richened these.

I shall seek those beauties in the spring,
When the days are fit and fair,
But only as foils to the one more thing
That also will flower there!

THE CHANGE

OUT of the past there rises a week—
Who shall read the years O!—
Out of the past there rises a week
Enringed with a purple zone.
Out of the past there rises a week
When thoughts were strung too thick to speak,
And the magic of its lineaments remains with me alone.

In that week there was heard a singing—
Who shall spell the years, the years!—
In that week there was heard a singing,
And the white owl wondered why.
In that week, yea, a voice was ringing,
And forth from the casement were candles flinging
Radiance that fell on the deodar and lit up the path thereby.

Could that song have a mocking note?—
Who shall unroll the years O!—
Could that song have a mocking note
To the white owl's sense as it fell?
Could that song have a mocking note
As it trilled out warm from the singer's throat,
And who was the mocker and who the mocked when two felt all was well?

In a tedious trampling crowd yet later—
Who shall bare the years, the years!—
In a tedious trampling crowd yet later,
When silvery singings were dumb;
In a crowd uncaring what time might fate her,
Mud murks of night I stood to await her,
And the twanging of iron wheels gave out the signal that she was come.

She said with a travel-tired smile—
Who shall lift the years O!—
She said with a travel-tired smile,
Half scared by scene so strange;
She said, outworn by mile on mile,
The blurred lamps wanning her face the while,
"O Love, I am here; I am with you!" . . . Ah, that there should have come a change!

O the doom by someone spoken—
Who shall unseal the years, the years!—
O the doom that gave no token,
When nothing of bale saw we:
O the doom by someone spoken,
O the heart by someone broken,
The heart whose sweet reverberances are all time leaves to me.

Jan.-Feb. 1913.

SITTING ON THE BRIDGE

(*Echo of an old song*)

SITTING on the bridge
Past the barracks, town and ridge,
At once the spirit seized us
To sing a song that pleased us—
As "The Fifth" were much in rumour;
It was "Whilst I'm in the humour,
Take me, Paddy, will you now?"
And a lancer soon drew nigh,
And his Royal Irish eye
Said, "Willing, faith, am I,
O, to take you anyhow, dears,
To take you anyhow."

But, lo!—dad walking by,
Cried, "What, you lightheels! Fie!
Is this the way you roam
And mock the sunset gleam?"
And he marched us straightway home,
Though we said, "We are only, daddy,
Singing, 'Will you take me, Paddy?'"
—Well, we never saw from then,
If we sang there anywhen,
The soldier dear again,
Except at night in dream-time,
Except at night in dream.

Perhaps that soldier's fighting
In a land that's far away,
Or he may be idly plighting
Some foreign hussy gay;
Or perhaps his bones are whiting
In the wind to their decay! . . .
Ah!—does he mind him how
The girls he saw that day
On the bridge, were sitting singing
At the time of curfew-ringing,
"Take me, Paddy; will you now, dear?
Paddy, will you now?"

GREY'S BRIDGE.

THE YOUNG CHURCHWARDEN

WHEN he lit the candles there,
And the light fell on his hand,
And it trembled as he scanned
Her and me, his vanquished air
Hinted that his dream was done,
And I saw he had begun
    To understand.

When Love's viol was unstrung,
Sore I wished the hand that shook
Had been mine that shared her book
While that evening hymn was sung,
His the victor's, as he lit
Candles where he had bidden us sit
    With vanquished look.

Now her dust lies listless there,
His afar from tending hand,
What avails the victory scanned?
Does he smile from upper air:
"Ah, my friend, your dream is done;
And 'tis *you* who have begun
    To understand!"

"I TRAVEL AS A PHANTOM NOW"

I TRAVEL as a phantom now,
For people do not wish to see
In flesh and blood so bare a bough
    As Nature makes of me.

And thus I visit bodiless
Strange gloomy households often at odds,
And wonder if Man's consciousness
    Was a mistake of God's.

And next I meet you, and I pause,
And think that if mistake it were,
As some have said, O then it was
One that I well can bear!

1915.

LINES

TO A MOVEMENT IN MOZART'S E-FLAT SYMPHONY

SHOW me again the time
When in the Junetide's prime
We flew by meads and mountains northerly!—
Yea, to such freshness, fairness, fulness, fineness, freeness,
Love lures life on.

Show me again the day
When from the sandy bay
We looked together upon the pestered sea!—
Yea, to such surging, swaying, sighing, swelling, shrinking,
Love lures life on.

Show me again the hour
When by the pinnacled tower
We eyed each other and feared futurity!—
Yea, to such bodings, broodings, beatings, blanchings, blessings,
Love lures life on.

Show me again just this:
The moment of that kiss
Away from the prancing folk, by the strawberry-tree!—
Yea, to such rashness, ratheness, rareness, ripeness, richness,
Love lures life on.

Begun November 1898.

"IN THE SEVENTIES"

"Qui deridetur ab amico suo sicut ego."—JOB.

IN the seventies I was bearing in my breast,
Penned tight,
Certain starry thoughts that threw a magic light
On the worktimes and the soundless hours of rest

In the seventies; aye, I bore them in my breast
Penned tight.

In the seventies when my neighbours—even my friend—
Saw me pass,
Heads were shaken, and I heard the words, "Alas,
For his onward years and name unless he mend!"
In the seventies, when my neighbours and my friend
Saw me pass.

In the seventies those who met me did not know
Of the vision
That immuned me from the chillings of misprision
And the damps that choked my goings to and fro
In the seventies; yea, those nodders did not know
Of the vision.

In the seventies nought could darken or destroy it,
Locked in me,
Though as delicate as lamp-worm's lucency;
Neither mist nor murk could weaken or alloy it
In the seventies!—could not darken or destroy it,
Locked in me.

THE PEDIGREE

I

I BENT in the deep of night
Over a pedigree the chronicler gave
As mine; and as I bent there, half-unrobed,
The uncurtained panes of my window-square let in the watery light
Of the moon in its old age:
And green-rheumed clouds were hurrying past where mute and cold it globed
Like a drifting dolphin's eye seen through a lapping wave.

II

So, scanning my sire-sown tree,
And the hieroglyphs of this spouse tied to that,
With offspring mapped below in lineage,
Till the tangles troubled me,

The branches seemed to twist into a seared and cynic face
Which winked and tokened towards the window like a Mage
Enchanting me to gaze again thereat.

III

It was a mirror now,
And in it a long perspective I could trace
Of my begetters, dwindling backward each past each
All with the kindred look,
Whose names had since been inked down in their place
On the recorder's book,
Generation and generation of my mien, and build, and brow.

IV

And then did I divine
That every heave and coil and move I made
Within my brain, and in my mood and speech,
Was in the glass portrayed
As long forestalled by their so making it;
The first of them, the primest fuglemen of my line,
Being fogged in far antiqueness past surmise and reason's reach.

V

Said I then, sunk in tone,
"I am merest mimicker and counterfeit!—
Though thinking, *I am I*,
And what I do I do myself alone."
—The cynic twist of the page thereat unknit
Back to its normal figure, having wrought its purport wry,
The Mage's mirror left the window-square,
And the stained moon and drift retook their places there.

1916.

HIS HEART

A WOMAN'S DREAM

At midnight, in the room where he lay dead
Whom in his life I had never clearly read,
I thought if I could peer into that citadel
His heart, I should at last know full and well

What hereto had been known to him alone,
Despite our long sit-out of years foreflown,
"And if," I said, "I do this for his memory's sake,
It would not wound him, even if he could wake."

So I bent over him. He seemed to smile
With a calm confidence the whole long while
That I, withdrawing his heart, held it and, bit by bit,
Perused the unguessed things found written on it.

It was inscribed like a terrestrial sphere
With quaint vermiculations close and clear—
His graving. Had I known, would I have risked the stroke
Its reading brought, and my own heart nigh broke!

Yes, there at last, eyes opened, did I see
His whole sincere symmetric history;
There were his truth, his simple singlemindedness,
Strained maybe, by time's storms, but there no less.

There were the daily deeds from sun to sun
In blindness, but good faith, that he had done;
There were regrets, at instances wherein he swerved
(As he conceived) from cherishings I had deserved.

There were old hours all figured down as bliss—
Those spent with me—(how little had I thought this!)
There those when, at my absence, whether he slept or waked,
(Though I knew not 'twas so!) his spirit ached.

There that when we were severed, how day dulled
Till time joined us anew, was chronicled:
And arguments and battlings in defence of me
That heart recorded clearly and ruddily.

I put it back, and left him as he lay
While pierced the morning pink and then the gray
Into each dreary room and corridor around,
Where I shall wait, but his step will not sound.

WHERE THEY LIVED

DISHEVELLED leaves creep down
Upon that bank to-day,
Some green, some yellow, and some pale brown;
The wet bents bob and sway;
The once warm slippery turf is sodden
Where we laughingly sat or lay.

The summerhouse is gone,
Leaving a weedy space;
The bushes that veiled it once have grown
Gaunt trees that interlace,
Through whose lank limbs I see too clearly
The nakedness of the place.

And where were hills of blue,
Blind drifts of vapour blow,
And the names of former dwellers few,
If any, people know,
And instead of a voice that called, "Come in, Dears,"
Time calls, "Pass below!"

THE OCCULTATION

WHEN the cloud shut down on the morning shine,
And darkened the sun,
I said, "So ended that joy of mine
Years back begun."

But day continued its lustrous roll
In upper air;
And did my late irradiate soul
Live on somewhere?

LIFE LAUGHS ONWARD

RAMBLING I looked for an old abode
Where, years back, one had lived I knew:
Its site a dwelling duly showed,
But it was new.

I went where, not so long ago,
The sod had riven two breasts asunder;
Daisies throve gaily there, as though
No grave were under.

I walked along a terrace where
Loud children gambolled in the sun;
The figure that had once sat there
Was missed by none.

Life laughed and moved on unsubdued,
I saw that Old succumbed to Young:
'Twas well. My too regretful mood
Died on my tongue.

THE PEACE-OFFERING

IT was but a little thing,
Yet I knew it meant to me
Ease from what had given a sting
To the very birdsinging
Latterly.

But I would not welcome it;
And for all I then declined
O the regrettings infinite
When the night-processions flit
Through the mind!

"SOMETHING TAPPED"

SOMETHING tapped on the pane of my room
When there was never a trace
Of wind or rain, and I saw in the gloom
My weary Belovéd's face.

"O I am tired of waiting," she said,
"Night, morn, noon, afternoon;
So cold it is in my lonely bed,
And I thought you would join me soon!"

I rose and neared the window-glass,
But vanished thence had she:
Only a pallid moth, alas,
Tapped at the pane for me.

August 1913.

THE WOUND

I CLIMBED to the crest,
And, fog-festooned,
The sun lay west
Like a crimson wound:

Like that wound of mine
Of which none knew,
For I'd given no sign
That it pierced me through.

A MERRYMAKING IN QUESTION

"I WILL get a new string for my fiddle,
And call to the neighbours to come,
And partners shall dance down the middle
Until the old pewter-wares hum:
And we'll sip the mead, cyder, and rum!"

From the night came the oddest of answers:
A hollow wind, like a bassoon,
And headstones all ranged up as dancers,
And cypresses droning a croon,
And gurgoyles that mouthed to the tune.

"I SAID AND SANG HER EXCELLENCE"

(Fickle Lover's Song)

I SAID and sang her excellence:
They called it laud undue.
(Have your way, my heart, O!)
Yet what was homage far above
The plain deserts of my olden Love
Proved verity of my new.

"She moves a sylph in picture-land,
Where nothing frosts the air:"
(Have your way, my heart, O!)
"To all winged pipers overhead
She is known by shape and song," I said,
Conscious of licence there.

I sang of her in a dim old hall
Dream-built too fancifully,
(Have your way, my heart, O!)
But lo, the ripe months chanced to lead
My feet to such a hall indeed,
Where stood the very She.

Strange, startling, was it then to learn
I had glanced down unborn time,
(Have your way, my heart, O!)
And prophesied, whereby I knew
That which the years had planned to do
In warranty of my rhyme.

BY RUSHY-POND.

A JANUARY NIGHT

(1879)

THE rain smites more and more,
The east wind snarls and sneezes;
Through the joints of the quivering door
The water wheezes.

The tip of each ivy-shoot
Writhes on its neighbour's face;
There is some hid dread afoot
That we cannot trace.

Is it the spirit astray
Of the man at the house below
Whose coffin they took in to-day?
We do not know.

A KISS

BY a wall the stranger now calls his,
Was born of old a particular kiss,
Without forethought in its genesis;
Which in a trice took wing on the air.
And where that spot is nothing shows:
There ivy calmly grows,
And no one knows
What a birth was there!

That kiss is gone where none can tell,—
Not even those who felt its spell:
It cannot have died; that know we well.
Somewhere it pursues its flight,
One of a long procession of sounds
Travelling aethereal rounds
Far from earth's bounds
In the infinite.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

THEY came, the brothers, and took two chairs
In their usual quiet way;
And for a time we did not think
They had much to say.

And they began and talked awhile
Of ordinary things,
Till spread that silence in the room
A pent thought brings.

And then they said: "The end has come.
Yes: it has come at last."
And we looked down, and knew that day
A spirit had passed.

THE OXEN

CHRISTMAS EVE, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

1915.

THE TRESSES

"When the air was damp
It made my curls hang slack
As they kissed my neck and back
While I footed the salt-aired track
I loved to tramp.

"When it was dry
They would roll up crisp and tight
As I went on in the light
Of the sun, which my own sprite
Seemed to outvie.

"Now I am old;
And have not one gay curl
As I had when a girl
For dampness to unfurl
Or sun uphold!'

THE PHOTOGRAPH

The flame crept up the portrait line by line
As it lay on the coals in the silence of night's profound,
And over the arm's incline,
And along the marge of the silkwork superfine,
And gnawed at the delicate bosom's defenceless round.

Then I vented a cry of hurt, and averted my eyes;
The spectacle was one that I could not bear,
To my deep and sad surprise;
But, compelled to heed, I again looked furtivewise
Till the flame had eaten her breasts, and mouth, and hair.

"Thank God, she is out of it now!" I said at last,
In a great relief of heart when the thing was done
That had set my soul aghast,
And nothing was left of the picture unsheathed from the past
But the ashen ghost of the card it had figured on.

She was a woman long hid amid packs of years,
She might have been living or dead; she was lost to my sight,
And the deed that had nigh drawn tears
Was done in a casual clearance of life's arrears;
But I felt as if I had put her to death that night! . . .

. . . . . .

—Well; she knew nothing thereof did she survive,
And suffered nothing if numbered among the dead;
Yet—yet—if on earth alive
Did she feel a smart, and with vague strange anguish strive?
If in heaven, did she smile at me sadly and shake her head?

ON A HEATH

I could hear a gown-skirt rustling
Before I could see her shape,
Rustling through the heather
That wove the common's drape,
On that evening of dark weather
When I hearkened, lips agape.

And the town-shine in the distance
Did but baffle here the sight,
And then a voice flew forward:
"Dear, is't you? I fear the night!
And the herons flapped to norward
In the firs upon my right.

There was another looming
Whose life we did not see;
There was one stilly blooming
Full nigh to where walked we;
There was a shade entombing
All that was bright of me.

AN ANNIVERSARY

It was at the very date to which we have come,
In the month of the matching name,
When, at a like minute, the sun had upswum,
Its couch-time at night being the same.

And the same path stretched here that people now follow,
And the same stile crossed their way,
And beyond the same green hillock and hollow
The same horizon lay;
And the same man pilgrims now hereby who pilgrimed here that day.

Let so much be said of the date-day's sameness;
But the tree that neighbours the track,
And stoops like a pedlar afflicted with lameness,
Knew of no sogged wound or wind-crack.
And the stones of that wall were not enshrouded
With mosses of many tones,
And the garth up afar was not overcrowded
With a multitude of white stones,
And the man's eyes then were not so sunk that you saw the socket-bones.

KINGSTON-MAURWARD EWELEASE.

"BY THE RUNIC STONE"

(Two who became a story)

BY the Runic Stone
They sat, where the grass sloped down,
And chattered, he white-hatted, she in brown,
Pink-faced, breeze-blown.

Rapt there alone
In the transport of talking so
In such a place, there was nothing to let them know
What hours had flown.

And the die thrown
By them heedlessly there, the dent
It was to cut in their encompassment,
Were, too, unknown.

It might have strown
Their zest with qualms to see,
As in a glass, Time toss their history
From zone to zone!

THE PINK FROCK

"O MY pretty pink frock,
I sha'n't be able to wear it!
Why is he dying just now?
I hardly can bear it!

"He might have contrived to live on;
But they say there's no hope whatever:
And must I shut myself up,
And go out never?

"O my pretty pink frock?
Puff-sleeved and accordion-pleated!
He might have passed in July,
And not so cheated!"

TRANSFORMATIONS

PORTION of this yew
Is a man my grandsire knew,
Bosomed here at its foot:
This branch may be his wife,
A ruddy human life
Now turned to a green shoot.

These grasses must be made
Of her who often prayed,
Last century, for repose;
And the fair girl long ago
Whom I often tried to know
May be entering this rose.

So, they are not underground,
But as nerves and veins abound
In the growths of upper air,
And they feel the sun and rain,
And the energy again
That made them what they were!

IN HER PRECINCTS

HER house looked cold from the foggy lea,
And the square of each window a dull black blur
        Where showed no stir:
Yes, her gloom within at the lack of me
Seemed matching mine at the lack of her.

The black squares grew to be squares of light
As the eveshade swathed the house and lawn,
        And viols gave tone;
There was glee within. And I found that night
The gloom of severance mine alone.

KINGSTON-MAURWARD PARK.

THE LAST SIGNAL

(*Oct.* 11, 1886)

A MEMORY OF WILLIAM BARNES

  SILENTLY I footed by an uphill road
  That led from my abode to a spot yew-boughed;
Yellowly the sun sloped low down to westward,
        And dark was the east with cloud.

  Then, below the shadow of that livid sad east,
  Where the light was least, and a gate stood wide,
Flashed back the fire of the sun that was facing it,
        Like a brief blaze on that side.

  Looking hard and harder I knew what it meant—
  The sudden shine sent from the livid east scene;
It meant the west mirrored by the coffin of my friend there,
        Turning to the road from his green,

  To take his last journey forth—he who in his prime
  Trudged so many a time from that gate athwart the land!
Thus a farewell to me he signalled on his grave-way,
        As with a wave of his hand.

WINTERBORNE-CAME PATH.

THE HOUSE OF SILENCE

"THAT is a quiet place—
That house in the trees with the shady lawn."
"—If, child, you knew what there goes on
You would not call it a quiet place.
Why, a phantom abides there, the last of its race,
And a brain spins there till dawn."

"But I see nobody there,—
Nobody moves about the green,
Or wanders the heavy trees between."
"—Ah, that's because you do not bear
The visioning powers of souls who dare
To pierce the material screen.

"Morning, noon, and night,
Mid those funereal shades that seem
The uncanny scenery of a dream,
Figures dance to a mind with sight,
And music and laughter like floods of light
Make all the precincts gleam.

"It is a poet's bower,
Through which there pass, in fleet arrays,
Long teams of all the years and days,
Of joys and sorrows, of earth and heaven,
That meet mankind in its ages seven,
An aion in an hour."

GREAT THINGS

SWEET cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
Spinning down to Weymouth town
By Ridgway thirstily,
And maid and mistress summoning
Who tend the hostelry:
O cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

The dance it is a great thing,
   A great thing to me,
With candles lit and partners fit
   For night-long revelry;
And going home when day-dawning
   Peeps pale upon the lea:
O dancing is a great thing,
   A great thing to me!

Love is, yea, a great thing,
   A great thing to me,
When, having drawn across the lawn
   In darkness silently,
A figure flits like one a-wing
   Out from the nearest tree:
O love is, yes, a great thing,
   Aye, greatest thing to me!

Will these be always great things,
   Greatest things to me? . . .
Let it befall that One will call,
   "Soul, I have need of thee":
What then? Joy-jaunts, impassioned flings,
   Love, and its ecstasy,
Will always have been great things,
   Greatest things to me!

THE CHIMES

THAT morning when I trod the town
The twitching chimes of long renown
      Played out to me
The sweet Sicilian sailors' tune,
And I knew not if late or soon
      My day would be:

A day of sunshine beryl-bright
And windless; yea, think as I might,
      I could not say,
Even to within years' measure, when
One would be at my side who then
      Was far away.

When hard utilitarian times
Had stilled the sweet Saint-Peter's chimes
I learnt to see
That bale may spring where blisses are,
And one desired might be afar
Though near to me.

THE FIGURE IN THE SCENE

It pleased her to step in front and sit
Where the cragged slope was green,
While I stood back that I might pencil it
With her amid the scene;
Till it gloomed and rained;
But I kept on, despite the drifting wet
That fell and stained
My draught, leaving for curious quizzings yet
The blots engrained.

And thus I drew her there alone,
Seated amid the gauze
Of moisture, hooded, only her outline shown,
With rainfall marked across.
—Soon passed our stay;
Yet her rainy form is the Genius still of the spot,
Immutable, yea,
Though the place now knows her no more, and has known her not
Ever since that day.

From an old note.

"WHY DID I SKETCH"

Why did I sketch an upland green,
And put the figure in
Of one on the spot with me?—
For now that one has ceased to be seen
The picture waxes akin
To a wordless irony.

If you go drawing on down or cliff
    Let no soft curves intrude
    Of a woman's silhouette,
But show the escarpments stark and stiff
    As in utter solitude;
    So shall you half forget.

Let me sooner pass from sight of the sky
    Than again on a thoughtless day
    Limn, laugh, and sing, and rhyme
With a woman sitting near, whom I
    Paint in for love, and who may
    Be called hence in my time!

From an old note.

CONJECTURE

If there were in my kalendar
    No Emma, Florence, Mary,
What would be my existence now—
    A hermit's?—wanderer's weary?—
        How should I live, and how
        Near would be death, or far?

Could it have been that other eyes
    Might have uplit my highway?
That fond, sad, retrospective sight
    Would catch from this dim byway
        Prized figures different quite
        From those that now arise?

With how strange aspect would there creep
    The dawn, the night, the daytime,
If memory were not what it is
    In song-time, toil, or pray-time.—
        O were it else than this,
        I'd pass to pulseless sleep!

THE BLOW

THAT no man schemed it is my hope—
Yea, that it fell by will and scope
    Of That Which some enthrone,
And for whose meaning myriads grope.

For I would not that of my kind
There should, of his unbiassed mind,
    Have been one known
Who such a stroke could have designed;

Since it would augur works and ways
Below the lowest that man assays
    To have hurled that stone
Into the sunshine of our days!

And if it prove that no man did,
And that the Inscrutable, the Hid,
    Was cause alone
Of this foul crash our lives amid,

I'll go in due time, and forget
In some deep graveyard's oubliette
    The thing whereof I groan,
And cease from troubling; thankful yet

Time's finger should have stretched to show
No aimful author's was the blow
    That swept us prone,
But the Immanent Doer's That doth not know,

Which in some age unguessed of us
May lift Its blinding incubus,
    And see, and own:
"It grieves me I did thus and thus!"

LOVE THE MONOPOLIST

(Young Lover's Reverie)

THE train draws forth from the station-yard,
    And with it carries me.
I rise, and stretch out, and regard
    The platform left, and see
An airy slim blue form there standing,
      And know that it is she.

While with strained vision I watch on,
    The figure turns round quite
To greet friends gaily; then is gone. . . .
    The import may be slight,
But why remained she not hard gazing
    Till I was out of sight?

"O do not chat with others there,"
    I brood. "They are not I.
O strain your thoughts as if they were
    Gold bands between us; eye
All neighbour scenes as so much blankness
    Till I again am by!

"A troubled soughing in the breeze
    And the sky overhead
Let yourself feel; and shadeful trees,
    Ripe corn, and apples red,
Read as things barren and distasteful
    While we are separated!

"When I come back uncloak your gloom,
    And let in lovely day;
Then the long dark as of the tomb
    Can well be thrust away
With sweet things I shall have to practise,
    And you will have to say!"

Begun 1871: finished——

AT MIDDLE-FIELD GATE IN FEBRUARY

THE bars are thick with drops that show
As they gather themselves from the fog
Like silver buttons ranged in a row,
And as evenly spaced as if measured, although
They fall at the feeblest jog.

They load the leafless hedge hard by,
And the blades of last year's grass,
While the fallow ploughland turned up nigh
In raw rolls, clammy and clogging lie—
Too clogging for feet to pass.

How dry it was on a far-back day
When straws hung the hedge and around,
When amid the sheaves in amorous play
In curtained bonnets and light array
Bloomed a bevy now underground!

BOCKHAMPTON LANE.

THE YOUTH WHO CARRIED A LIGHT

I SAW him pass as the new day dawned,
Murmuring some musical phrase;
Horses were drinking and floundering in the pond,
And the tired stars thinned their gaze;
Yet these were not the spectacles at all that he conned,
But an inner one, giving out rays.

Such was the thing in his eye, walking there,
The very and visible thing,
A close light, displacing the gray of the morning air,
And the tokens that the dark was taking wing;
And was it not the radiance of a purpose rare
That might ripe to its accomplishing?

What became of that light? I wonder still its fate!
Was it quenched ere its full apogee?

Did it struggle frail and frailer to a beam emaciate?
    Did it thrive till matured in verity?
Or did it travel on, to be a new young dreamer's freight,
    And thence on infinitely?

1915.

THE HEAD ABOVE THE FOG

    Something do I see
Above the fog that sheets the mead,
A figure like to life indeed,
Moving along with spectre-speed,
    Seen by none but me.

    O the vision keen!—
Tripping along to me for love
As in the flesh it used to move,
Only its hat and plume above
    The evening fog-fleece seen.

    In the day-fall wan,
When nighted birds break off their song,
Mere ghostly head it skims along,
Just as it did when warm and strong,
    Body seeming gone.

    Such it is I see
Above the fog that sheets the mead—
Yea, that which once could breathe and plead!—
Skimming along with spectre-speed
    To a last tryst with me.

OVERLOOKING THE RIVER STOUR

The swallows flew in the curves of an eight
        Above the river-gleam
        In the wet June's last beam:
Like little crossbows animate
The swallows flew in the curves of an eight
        Above the river-gleam.

Planing up shavings of crystal spray
A moor-hen darted out
From the bank thereabout,
And through the stream-shine ripped his way;
Planing up shavings of crystal spray
A moor-hen darted out.

Closed were the kingcups; and the mead
Dripped in monotonous green,
Though the day's morning sheen
Had shown it golden and honeybee'd;
Closed were the kingcups; and the mead
Dripped in monotonous green.

And never I turned my head, alack,
While these things met my gaze
Through the pane's drop-drenched glaze,
To see the more behind my back. . . .
O never I turned, but let, alack,
These less things hold my gaze!

THE MUSICAL BOX

LIFELONG to be
Seemed the fair colour of the time;
That there was standing shadowed near
A spirit who sang to the gentle chime
Of the self-struck notes, I did not hear,
I did not see.

Thus did it sing
To the mindless lyre that played indoors
As she came to listen for me without:
"O value what the nonce outpours—
This best of life—that shines about
Your welcoming!"

I had slowed along
After the torrid hours were done,
Though still the posts and walls and road

Flung back their sense of the hot-faced sun,
And had walked by Stourside Mill, where broad
Stream-lilies throng.

And I descried
The dusky house that stood apart,
And her, white-muslined, waiting there
In the porch with high-expectant heart,
While still the thin mechanic air
Went on inside.

At whiles would flit
Swart bats, whose wings, be-webbed and tanned,
Whirred like the wheels of ancient clocks:
She laughed a hailing as she scanned
Me in the gloom, the tuneful box
Intoning it.

Lifelong to be
I thought it. That there watched hard by
A spirit who sang to the indoor tune,
"O make the most of what is nigh!"
I did not hear in my dull soul-swoon—
I did not see.

ON STURMINSTER FOOT-BRIDGE

RETICULATIONS creep upon the slack stream's face
When the wind skims irritably past,
The current clucks smartly into each hollow place
That years of flood have scrabbled in the pier's sodden base;
The floating-lily leaves rot fast.

On a roof stand the swallows ranged in wistful waiting rows,
Till they arrow off and drop like stones
Among the eyot-withies at whose foot the river flows:
And beneath the roof is she who in the dark world shows
As a lattice-gleam when midnight moans.

ROYAL SPONSORS

"THE king and the queen will stand to the child;
'Twill be handed down in song;
And it's no more than their deserving,
With my lord so faithful at Court so long,
And so staunch and strong.

"O never before was known such a thing!
'Twill be a grand time for all;
And the beef will be a whole-roast bullock,
And the servants will have a feast in the hall,
And the ladies a ball.

"While from Jordan's stream by a traveller,
In a flagon of silver wrought,
And by caravan, stage-coach, wain, and waggon
A precious trickle has been brought,
Clear as when caught."

The morning came. To the park of the peer
The royal couple bore;
And the font was filled with the Jordan water,
And the household awaited their guests before
The carpeted door.

But when they went to the silk-lined cot
The child was found to have died.
"What's now to be done? We can disappoint not
The king and queen!" the family cried
With eyes spread wide.

"Even now they approach the chestnut-drive!
The service must be read."
"Well, since we can't christen the child alive,
By God we shall have to christen him dead!"
The marquis said.

Thus, breath-forsaken, a corpse was taken
To the private chapel—yea—
And the king knew not, nor the queen, God wot,
That they answered for one returned to clay
At the font that day.

OLD FURNITURE

I KNOW not how it may be with others
Who sit amid relics of householdry
That date from the days of their mothers' mothers,
But well I know how it is with me
Continually.

I see the hands of the generations
That owned each shiny familiar thing
In play on its knobs and indentations,
And with its ancient fashioning
Still dallying:

Hands behind hands, growing paler and paler,
As in a mirror a candle-flame
Shows images of itself, each frailer
As it recedes, though the eye may frame
Its shape the same.

On the clock's dull dial a foggy finger,
Moving to set the minutes right
With tentative touches that lift and linger
In the wont of a moth on a summer night,
Creeps to my sight.

On this old viol, too, fingers are dancing—
As whilom—just over the strings by the nut,
The tip of a bow receding, advancing
In airy quivers, as if it would cut
The plaintive gut.

And I see a face by that box for tinder,
Glowing forth in fits from the dark,
And fading again, as the linten cinder
Kindles to red at the flinty spark,
Or goes out stark.

Well, well. It is best to be up and doing,
The world has no use for one to-day
Who eyes things thus—no aim pursuing!
He should not continue in this stay,
But sink away.

A THOUGHT IN TWO MOODS

I SAW it—pink and white—revealed
Upon the white and green;
The white and green was a daisied field,
The pink and white Ethleen.

And as I looked it seemed in kind
That difference they had none;
The two fair bodiments combined
As varied miens of one.

A sense that, in some mouldering year,
As one they both would lie,
Made me move quickly on to her
To pass the pale thought by.

She laughed and said: "Out there, to me,
You looked so weather-browned,
And brown in clothes, you seemed to be
Made of the dusty ground!"

THE LAST PERFORMANCE

"I AM playing my oldest tunes," declared she,
"All the old tunes I know,—
Those I learnt ever so long ago."
—Why she should think just then she'd play them
Silence cloaks like snow.

When I returned from the town at nightfall
Notes continued to pour
As when I had left two hours before:
"It's the very last time," she said in closing;
"From now I play no more."

A few morns onward found her fading,
And, as her life outflew,
I thought of her playing her tunes right through;
And I felt she had known of what was coming,
And wondered how she knew.

1912.

"YOU ON THE TOWER"

I

"YOU on the tower of my factory—
What do you see up there?
Do you see Enjoyment with wide wings
Advancing to reach me here?"
—"Yea; I see Enjoyment with wide wings
Advancing to reach you here."

II

"Good. Soon I'll come and ask you
To tell me again thereon. . . .
Well, what is he doing now? Hoi, there!"
—"He still is flying on."
"Ah, waiting till I have full-finished.
Good. Tell me again anon. . . .

III

Hoi, Watchman! I'm here. When comes he?
Between my sweats I am chill."
—"Oh, you there, working still?
Why, surely he reached you a time back,
And took you miles from your mill?
He duly came in his winging,
And now he has passed out of view.
How can it be that you missed him?
He brushed you by as he flew."

THE INTERLOPER

THERE are three folk driving in a quaint old chaise,
And the cliff-side track looks green and fair;
I view them talking in quiet glee
As they drop down towards the puffins' lair
By the roughest of ways;
But another with the three rides on, I see,
Whom I like not to be there!

No: it's not anybody you think of. Next
A dwelling appears by a slow sweet stream
Where two sit happy and half in the dark:
They read, helped out by a frail-wick'd gleam,
Some rhythmic text;
But one sits with them whom they don't mark,
One I'm wishing could not be there.

No: not whom you knew and name. And now
I discern gay diners in a mansion-place,
And the guests dropping wit—pert, prim, or choice,
And the hostess's tender and laughing face,
And the host's bland brow;
But I cannot help hearing a hollow voice,
And I'd fain not hear it there.

No: it's not from the stranger you met once. Ah,
Yet a goodlier scene than that succeeds;
People on a lawn—quite a crowd of them. Yes,
And they chatter and ramble as fancy leads;
And they say, "Hurrah!"
To a blithe speech made; save one, mirthless,
Who ought not to be there.

Nay: it's not the pale Form your imagings raise,
That waits on us all at a destined time,
It is not the Fourth Figure the Furnace showed;
O that it were such a shape sublime
In these latter days!
It is that under which best lives corrode;
Would, would it could not be there!

LOGS ON THE HEARTH

A MEMORY OF A SISTER.

The fire advances along the log
Of the tree we felled,
Which bloomed and bore striped apples by the peck
Till its last hour of bearing knelled.

The fork that first my hand would reach
And then my foot
In climbings upward inch by inch, lies now
Sawn, sapless, darkening with soot.

Where the bark chars is where, one year,
It was pruned, and bled—
Then overgrew the wound. But now, at last,
Its growings all have stagnated.

My fellow-climber rises dim
From her chilly grave—
Just as she was, her foot near mine on the bending limb,
Laughing, her young brown hand awave.

December 1915.

THE SUNSHADE

AH—it's the skeleton of a lady's sunshade,
Here at my feet in the hard rock's chink,
Merely a naked sheaf of wires!—
Twenty years have gone with their livers and diers
Since it was silked in its white or pink.

Noonshine riddles the ribs of the sunshade,
No more a screen from the weakest ray;
Nothing to tell us the hue of its dyes,
Nothing but rusty bones as it lies
In its coffin of stone, unseen till to-day.

Where is the woman who carried that sunshade
Up and down this seaside place?—
Little thumb standing against its stem,
Thoughts perhaps bent on a love-stratagem,
Softening yet more the already soft face!

Is the fair woman who carried that sunshade
A skeleton just as her property is,

Laid in the chink that none may scan?
And does she regret—if regret dust can—
The vain things thought when she flourished this?

SWANAGE CLIFFS.

THE AGEING HOUSE

WHEN the walls were red
That now are seen
To be overspread
With a mouldy green,
A fresh fair head
Would often lean
From the sunny casement
And scan the scene,
While blithely spoke the wind to the little sycamore tree.

But storms have raged
Those walls about,
And the head has aged
That once looked out;
And zest is suaged
And trust grows doubt,
And slow effacement
Is rife throughout,
While fiercely girds the wind at the long-limbed sycamore tree!

THE CAGED GOLDFINCH

WITHIN a churchyard, on a recent grave,
I saw a little cage
That jailed a goldfinch. All was silence save
Its hops from stage to stage.

There was inquiry in its wistful eye,
And once it tried to sing;
Of him or her who placed it there, and why,
No one knew anything.

AT MADAME TUSSAUD'S IN VICTORIAN YEARS

"THAT same first fiddler who leads the orchéstra to-night
Here fiddled four decades of years ago;
He bears the same babe-like smile of self-centred delight,
Same trinket on watch-chain, same ring on the hand with the bow.

"But his face, if regarded, is woefully wanner, and drier,
And his once dark beard has grown straggling and gray;
Yet a blissful existence he seems to have led with his lyre,
In a trance of his own, where no wearing or tearing had sway.

"Mid these wax figures, who nothing can do, it may seem
That to do but a little thing counts a great deal;
To be watched by kings, councillors, queens, may be flattering to him—
With their glass eyes longing they too could wake notes that appeal."

Ah, but he played staunchly—that fiddler—whoever he was,
With the innocent heart and the soul-touching string:
May he find the Fair Haven! For did he not smile with good cause?
Yes; gamuts that graced forty years'-flight were not a small thing!

THE BALLET

THEY crush together—a rustling heap of flesh—
Of more than flesh, a heap of souls; and then
They part, enmesh,
And crush together again,
Like the pink petals of a too sanguine rose
Frightened shut just when it blows.

Though all alike in their tinsel livery,
And indistinguishable at a sweeping glance,
They muster, maybe,
As lives wide in irrelevance;

A world of her own has each one underneath,
Detached as a sword from its sheath.

Daughters, wives, mistresses; honest or false, sold, bought;
Hearts of all sizes; gay, fond, gushing, or penned,
Various in thought
Of lover, rival, friend;
Linked in a one-pulsed chain, all showing one smile,
Yet severed so many a mile!

THE FIVE STUDENTS

THE sparrow dips in his wheel-rut bath,
The sun grows passionate-eyed,
And boils the dew to smoke by the paddock-path;
As strenuously we stride,—
Five of us; dark He, fair He, dark She, fair She, I,
All beating by.

The air is shaken, the high-road hot,
Shadowless swoons the day,
The greens are sobered and cattle at rest; but not
We on our urgent way,—
Four of us; fair She, dark She, fair He, I, are there,
But one—elsewhere.

Autumn moulds the hard fruit mellow,
And forward still we press
Through moors, briar-meshed plantations, clay-pits yellow,
As in the spring hours—yes,
Three of us; fair He, fair She, I, as heretofore,
But—fallen one more.

The leaf drops: earthworms draw it in
At night-time noiselessly,
The fingers of birch and beech are skeleton-thin,
And yet on the beat are we,—
Two of us; fair She, I. But no more left to go
The track we know.

Icicles tag the church-aisle leads,
The flag-rope gibbers hoarse,
The home-bound foot-folk wrap their snow-flaked heads,
Yet I still stalk the course—
One of us. . . . Dark and fair He, dark and fair She, gone:
The rest—anon.

THE WIND'S PROPHECY

I TRAVEL on by barren farms,
And gulls glint out like silver flecks
Against a cloud that speaks of wrecks,
And bellies down with black alarms.
I say: "Thus from my lady's arms
I go; those arms I love the best!"
The wind replies from dip and rise,
"Nay; toward her arms thou journeyest."

A distant verge morosely gray
Appears, while clots of flying foam
Break from its muddy monochrome,
And a light blinks up far away.
I sigh: "My eyes now as all day
Behold her ebon loops of hair!"
Like bursting bonds the wind responds,
"Nay, wait for tresses flashing fair!"

From tides the lofty coastlands screen
Come smitings like the slam of doors,
Or hammerings on hollow floors,
As the swell cleaves through caves unseen.
Say I: "Though broad this wild terrene,
Her city home is matched of none!"
From the hoarse skies the wind replies:
"Thou shouldst have said her sea-bord one."

The all-prevailing clouds exclude
The one quick timorous transient star;
The waves outside where breakers are
Huzza like a mad multitude.

"Where the sun ups it, mist-imbued,"
I cry, "there reigns the star for me!"
The wind outshrieks from points and peaks:
"Here, westward, where it downs, mean ye!"

Yonder the headland, vulturine,
Snores like old Skrymer in his sleep,
And every chasm and every steep
Blackens as wakes each pharos-shine.
"I roam, but one is safely mine,"
I say. "God grant she stay my own!"
Low laughs the wind as if it grinned:
"Thy Love is one thou'st not yet known."

Rewritten from an old copy.

DURING WIND AND RAIN

They sing their dearest songs—
He, she, all of them—yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss—
Elders and juniors—aye,
Making the pathways neat
And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the webbed white storm-birds wing across.

They are blithely breakfasting all—
Men and maidens—yea,
Under the summer tree,
With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them—aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And brightest things that are theirs. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their chiselled names the rain-drop ploughs.

HE PREFERS HER EARTHLY

THIS after-sunset is a sight for seeing,
Cliff-heads of craggy cloud surrounding it.
—And dwell you in that glory-show?
You may; for there are strange strange things in being,
Stranger than I know.

Yet if that chasm of splendour claim your presence
Which glows between the ash cloud and the dun,
How changed must be your mortal mould!
Changed to a firmament-riding earthless essence
From what you were of old:

All too unlike the fond and fragile creature
Then known to me. . . . Well, shall I say it plain?
I would not have you thus and there,
But still would grieve on, missing you, still feature
You as the one you were.

THE DOLLS

"WHENEVER you dress me dolls, mammy,
Why do you dress them so,
And make them gallant soldiers,
When never a one I know;
And not as gentle ladies
With frills and frocks and curls,
As people dress the dollies
Of other little girls?"

Ah—why did she not answer:—
    "Because your mammy's heed
Is always gallant soldiers,
    As well may be, indeed.
One of them was your daddy,
    His name I must not tell;
He's not the dad who lives here,
    But one I love too well."

MOLLY GONE

No more summer for Molly and me;
    There is snow on the tree,
And the blackbirds plump large as the rooks are, almost,
    And the water is hard
Where they used to dip bills at the dawn ere her figure was lost
    To these coasts, now my prison close-barred.

No more planting by Molly and me
    Where the beds used to be
Of sweet-william; no training the clambering rose
    By the framework of fir
Now bowering the pathway, whereon it swings gaily and blows
    As if calling commendment from her.

No more jauntings by Molly and me
    To the town by the sea,
Or along over Whitesheet to Wynyard's green Gap,
    Catching Montacute Crest
To the right against Sedgmoor, and Corton-Hill's far-distant cap,
    And Pilsdon and Lewsdon to west.

No more singing by Molly to me
    In the evenings when she
Was in mood and in voice, and the candles were lit,
    And past the porch-quoin
The rays would spring out on the laurels; and dumbledores hit
    On the pane, as if wishing to join.

Where, then, is Molly, who's no more with me?
    —As I stand on this lea,

Thinking thus, there's a many-flamed star in the air,
That tosses a sign
That her glance is regarding its face from her home, so that there
Her eyes may have meetings with mine.

A BACKWARD SPRING

THE trees are afraid to put forth buds,
And there is timidity in the grass;
The plots lie gray where gouged by spuds,
And whether next week will pass
Free of sly sour winds is the fret of each bush
Of barberry waiting to bloom.

Yet the snowdrop's face betrays no gloom,
And the primrose pants in its heedless push,
Though the myrtle asks if it's worth the fight
This year with frost and rime
To venture one more time
On delicate leaves and buttons of white
From the selfsame bough as at last year's prime,
And never to ruminate on or remember
What happened to it in mid-December.

April 1917.

LOOKING ACROSS

I

IT is dark in the sky,
And silence is where
Our laughs rang high;
And recall do I
That One is out there.

II

The dawn is not nigh,
And the trees are bare,

And the waterways sigh
That a year has drawn by,
And Two are out there.

III

The wind drops to die
Like the phantom of Care
Too frail for a cry,
And heart brings to eye
That Three are out there.

IV

This Life runs dry
That once ran rare
And rosy in dye,
And fleet the days fly,
And Four are out there.

V

Tired, tired am I
Of this earthly air,
And my wraith asks: Why,
Since these calmly lie,
Are not Five out there?

December 1915.

AT A SEASIDE TOWN IN 1869

(*Young Lover's Reverie*)

I WENT and stood outside myself,
Spelled the dark sky
And ship-lights nigh,
And grumbling winds that passed thereby.

Then next inside myself I looked,
And there, above
All, shone my Love,
That nothing matched the image of.

Beyond myself again I ranged;
    And saw the free
    Life by the sea,
And folk indifferent to me.

O 'twas a charm to draw within
    Thereafter, where
    But she was; care
For one thing only, her hid there!

But so it chanced, without myself
    I had to look,
    And then, I took
More heed of what I had long forsook:

The boats, the sands, the esplanade,
    The laughing crowd;
    Light-hearted, loud
Greetings from some not ill-endowed;

The evening sunlit cliffs, the talk,
    Hailings and halts,
    The keen sea-salts,
The band, the Morgenblatter Waltz.

Still, when at night I drew inside
    Forward she came,
    Sad, but the same
As when I first had known her name.

Then rose a time when, as by force,
    Outwardly wooed
    By contacts crude,
Her image in abeyance stood. . . .

At last I said; This outside life
    Shall not endure;
    I'll seek the pure
Thought-world, and bask in her allure.

Myself again I crept within,
    Scanned with keen care
    The temple where
She'd shone, but could not find her there.

I sought and sought. But O her soul
Has not since thrown
Upon my own
One beam! Yea, she is gone, is gone.

From an old note.

THE GLIMPSE

SHE sped through the door
And, following in haste,
And stirred to the core,
I entered hot-faced;
But I could not find her,
No sign was behind her.
"Where is she?" I said:
—"Who?" they asked that sat there;
"Not a soul's come in sight."
—"A maid with red hair."
—"Ah." They paled. "She is dead.
People see her at night,
But you are the first
On whom she has burst
In the keen common light."

It was ages ago,
When I was quite strong:
I have waited since,—O,
I have waited so long!
—Yea, I set me to own
The house, where now lone
I dwell in void rooms
Booming hollow as tombs!
But I never come near her,
Though nightly I hear her.
And my cheek has grown thin
And my hair has grown gray
With this waiting therein;
But she still keeps away!

THE PEDESTRIAN

AN INCIDENT OF 1883

"SIR, will you let me give you a ride?
Nox venit, and the heath is wide."
—My phaeton-lantern shone on one
Young, fair, even fresh,
But burdened with flesh:
A leathern satchel at his side,
His breathings short, his coat undone.

'Twas as if his corpulent figure slopped
With the shake of his walking when he stopped,
And, though the night's pinch grew acute,
He wore but a thin
Wind-thridded suit,
Yet well-shaped shoes for walking in,
Artistic beaver, cane gold-topped.

"Alas, my friend," he said with a smile,
"I am daily bound to foot ten mile—
Wet, dry, or dark— before I rest.
Six months to live
My doctors give
Me as my prospect here, at best,
Unless I vamp my sturdiest!"

His voice was that of a man refined,
A man, one well could feel, of mind,
Quite winning in its musical ease;
But in mould maligned
By some disease;
And I asked again. But he shook his head;
Then, as if more were due, he said:—

"A student was I—of Schopenhauer,
Kant, Hegel,—and the fountained bower
Of the Muses, too, knew my regard:
But ah—I fear me
The grave gapes near me! . . .

Would I could this gross sheath discard,
And rise an ethereal shape, unmarred!"

How I remember him!—his short breath,
His aspect, marked for early death,
As he dropped into the night for ever;
One caught in his prime
Of high endeavour;
From all philosophies soon to sever
Through an unconscienced trick of Time!

"WHO'S IN THE NEXT ROOM?"

"WHO'S in the next room?—who?
I seemed to see
Somebody in the dawning passing through,
Unknown to me."
"Nay: you saw nought. He passed invisibly."

"Who's in the next room?—who?
I seem to hear
Somebody muttering firm in a language new
That chills the ear."
"No: you catch not his tongue who has entered there."

"Who's in the next room?—who?
I seem to feel
His breath like a clammy draught, as if it drew
From the Polar Wheel."
"No: none who breathes at all does the door conceal."

"Who's in the next room?—who?
A figure wan
With a message to one in there of something due?
Shall I know him anon?"
"Yea he; and he brought such; and you'll know him anon.

AT A COUNTRY FAIR

At a bygone Western country fair
I saw a giant led by a dwarf
With a red string like a long thin scarf;
How much he was the stronger there
The giant seemed unaware.

And then I saw that the giant was blind,
And the dwarf a shrewd-eyed little thing;
The giant, mild, timid, obeyed the string
As if he had no independent mind,
Or will of any kind.

Wherever the dwarf decided to go
At his heels the other trotted meekly,
(Perhaps—I know not—reproaching weakly)
Like one Fate bade that it must be so,
Whether he wished or no.

Various sights in various climes
I have seen, and more I may see yet,
But that sight never shall I forget,
And have thought it the sorriest of pantomimes,
If once, a hundred times!

THE MEMORIAL BRASS: 186–

"Why do you weep there, O sweet lady,
Why do you weep before that brass?—
(I'm a mere student sketching the mediaeval)
Is some late death lined there, alas?—
Your father's? . . . Well, all pay the debt that paid he!"

"Young man, O must I tell!—My husband's! And under
His name I set mine, and my *death*!—
Its date left vacant till my heirs should fill it,
Stating me faithful till my last breath."
—"Madam, that you are a widow wakes my wonder!"

"O wait! For last month I—remarried!
And now I fear 'twas a deed amiss.
We've just come home. And I am sick and saddened
At what the new one will say to this;
And will he think—think that I should have tarried?

"I may add, surely,—with no wish to harm him—
That he's a temper—yes, I fear!
And when he comes to church next Sunday morning,
And sees that written . . . O dear, O dear!"
—"Madam, I swear your beauty will disarm him!"

HER LOVE-BIRDS

When I looked up at my love-birds
That Sunday afternoon,
There was in their tiny tune
A dying fetch like broken words,
When I looked up at my love-birds
That Sunday afternoon.

When he, too, scanned the love-birds
On entering there that day,
'Twas as if he had nought to say
Of his long journey citywards,
When he, too, scanned the love-birds,
On entering there that day.

And billed and billed the love-birds,
As 'twere in fond despair
At the stress of silence where
Had once been tones in tenor thirds,
And billed and billed the love-birds
As 'twere in fond despair.

O, his speech that chilled the love-birds,
And smote like death on me,
As I learnt what was to be,
And knew my life was broke in sherds!
O, his speech that chilled the love-birds,
And smote like death on me!

PAYING CALLS

I WENT by footpath and by stile
Beyond where bustle ends,
Strayed here a mile and there a mile
And called upon some friends.

On certain ones I had not seen
For years past did I call,
And then on others who had been
The oldest friends of all.

It was the time of midsummer
When they had used to roam;
But now, though tempting was the air,
I found them all at home.

I spoke to one and other of them
By mound and stone and tree
Of things we had done ere days were dim,
But they spoke not to me.

THE UPPER BIRCH-LEAVES

WARM yellowy-green
In the blue serene,
How they skip and sway
On this autumn day!
They cannot know
What has happened below,—
That their boughs down there
Are already quite bare,
That their own will be
When a week has passed,—
For they jig as in glee
To this very last.

But no; there lies
At times in their tune
A note that cries
What at first I fear

I did not hear:
"O we remember
At each wind's hollo—
Though life holds yet—
We go hence soon,
For 'tis November;
—But that you follow
You may forget!"

"IT NEVER LOOKS LIKE SUMMER"

"It never looks like summer here
On Beeny by the sea."
But though she saw its look as drear,
Summer it seemed to me.

It never looks like summer now
Whatever weather's there;
But ah, it cannot anyhow,
On Beeny or elsewhere!

Boscastle.
March 8, 1913.

EVERYTHING COMES

"The house is bleak and cold
Built so new for me!
All the winds upon the wold
Search it through for me;
No screening trees abound,
And the curious eyes around,
Keep on view for me."

"My Love, I am planting trees
As a screen for you
Both from winds, and eyes that tease
And peer in for you.

Only wait till they have grown,
No such bower will be known
    As I mean for you."

"Then I will bear it, Love,
    And will wait," she said.
—So, with years, there grew a grove.
    "Skill how great!" she said.
"As you wished, Dear?"—"Yes, I see!
But—I'm dying; and for me
    'Tis too late," she said.

THE MAN WITH A PAST

    THERE was merry-making
    When the first dart fell
    As a heralding,—
Till grinned the fully bared thing,
    And froze like a spell—
        Like a spell.

    Innocent was she,
    Innocent was I,
    Too simple we!
Before us we did not see,
    Nearing, aught wry—
        Aught wry!

    I can tell it not now.
    It was long ago;
    And such things cow;
But that is why and how
    Two lives were so—
        Were so.

    Yes, the years matured,
    And the blows were three
    That time ensured
On her, which she dumbly endured;
    And one on me—
        One on me.

HE FEARS HIS GOOD FORTUNE

THERE was a glorious time
At an epoch of my prime;
Mornings beryl-bespread,
And evenings golden-red;
Nothing gray:
And in my heart I said,
"However this chanced to be,
It is too full for me,
Too rare, too rapturous, rash,
Its spell must close with a crash
Some day!"

The radiance went on
Anon and yet anon,
And sweetness fell around
Like manna on the ground.
"I've no claim,"
Said I, "to be thus crowned:
I am not worthy this:—
Must it not go amiss?—
Well . . . let the end foreseen
Come duly!—I am serene."
—And it came.

HE WONDERS ABOUT HIMSELF

No use hoping, or feeling vext,
Tugged by a force above or under
Like some fantocine, much I wonder
What I shall find me doing next!

Shall I be rushing where bright eyes be?
Shall I be suffering sorrows seven?
Shall I be watching the stars of heaven,
Thinking one of them looks like thee?

Part is mine of the general Will,
Cannot my share in the sum of sources
Bend a digit the poise of forces,
And a fair desire fulfil?

Nov. 1893.

JUBILATE

"THE very last time I ever was here," he said,
"I saw much less of the quick than I saw of the dead."
—He was a man I had met with somewhere before,
But how or when I now could recall no more.

"The hazy mazy moonlight at one in the morning
Spread out as a sea across the frozen snow,
Glazed to live sparkles like the great breastplate adorning
The priest of the Temple, with Urim and Thummim aglow.

"The yew-tree arms, glued hard to the stiff stark air,
Hung still in the village sky as theatre-scenes
When I came by the churchyard wall, and halted there
At a shut-in sound of fiddles and tambourines.

"And as I stood hearkening, dulcimers, hautboys, and shawms,
And violoncellos, and a three-stringed double-bass,
Joined in, and were intermixed with a singing of psalms;
And I looked over at the dead men's dwelling-place.

"Through the shine of the slippery snow I now could see,
As it were through a crystal roof, a great company
Of the dead minueting in stately step underground
To the tune of the instruments I had before heard sound.

"It was 'Eden New,' and dancing they sang in a chore,
'We are out of it all!—yea, in Little-Ease cramped no more!'
And their shrouded figures pacing with joy I could see
As you see the stage from the gallery. And they had no heed of
me.

"And I lifted my head quite dazed from the churchyard wall
And I doubted not that it warned I should soon have my call.
But—" . . . Then in the ashes he emptied the dregs of his cup,
And onward he went, and the darkness swallowed him up.

HE REVISITS HIS FIRST SCHOOL

I SHOULD not have shown in the flesh,
I ought to have gone as a ghost;
It was awkward, unseemly almost,
Standing solidly there as when fresh,
    Pink, tiny, crisp-curled,
    My pinions yet furled
    From the winds of the world.

After waiting so many a year
To wait longer, and go as a sprite
From the tomb at the mid of some night
Was the right, radiant way to appear;
    Not as one wanzing weak
    From life's roar and reek,
    His rest still to seek:

Yea, beglimpsed through the quaint quarried glass
Of green moonlight, by me greener made,
When they'd cry, perhaps, "There sits his shade
In his olden haunt—just as he was
    When in Walkingame he
    Conned the grand Rule-of-Three
    With the bent of a bee."

But to show in the afternoon sun,
With an aspect of hollow-eyed care,
When none wished to see me come there,
Was a garish thing, better undone.
    Yes; wrong was the way;
    But yet, let me say,
    I may right it—some day.

"I THOUGHT, MY HEART"

I THOUGHT, my Heart, that you had healed
Of those sore smartings of the past,
And that the summers had oversealed
    All mark of them at last.

But closely scanning in the night
I saw them standing crimson-bright
Just as she made them:
Nothing could fade them;
Yea, I can swear
That there they were—
They still were there!

Then the Vision of her who cut them came,
And looking over my shoulder said,
"I am sure you deal me all the blame
For those sharp smarts and red;
But meet me, dearest, to-morrow night,
In the churchyard at the moon's half-height,
And so strange a kiss
Shall be mine, I wis,
That you'll cease to know
If the wounds you show
Be there or no!"

FRAGMENT

At last I entered a long dark gallery,
Catacomb-lined; and ranged at the side
Were the bodies of men from far and wide
Who, motion past, were nevertheless not dead.

"The sense of waiting here strikes strong;
Everyone's waiting, waiting, it seems to me;
What are you waiting for so long?—
What is to happen?" I said.

"O we are waiting for one called God," said they,
"(Though by some the Will, or Force, or Laws;
And, vaguely, by some, the Ultimate Cause;)
Waiting for him to see us before we are clay.
Yes; waiting, waiting, for God *to know it*." . . .
"To know what?" questioned I.
"To know how things have been going on earth and below it:
It is clear he must know some day."
I thereon asked them why.

"Since he made us humble pioneers
Of himself in consciousness of Life's tears,
It needs no mighty prophecy
To tell that what he could mindlessly show
His creatures, he himself will know.

"By some still close-cowled mystery
We have reached feeling faster than he,
But he will overtake us anon,
If the world goes on."

MIDNIGHT ON THE GREAT WESTERN

In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
And the roof-lamp's oily flame
Played down on his listless form and face,
Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
Or whence he came.

In the band of his hat the journeying boy
Had a ticket stuck; and a string
Around his neck bore the key of his box,
That twinkled gleams of the lamp's sad beams
Like a living thing.

What past can be yours, O journeying boy
Towards a world unknown,
Who calmly, as if incurious quite
On all at stake, can undertake
This plunge alone?

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,
Our rude realms far above,
Whence with spacious vision you mark and mete
This region of sin that you find you in,
But are not of?

HONEYMOON TIME AT AN INN

AT the shiver of morning, a little before the false dawn,
The moon was at the window-square,
Deedily brooding in deformed decay—
The curve hewn off her cheek as by an adze;
At the shiver of morning a little before the false dawn
So the moon looked in there.

Her speechless eyeing reached across the chamber,
Where lay two souls opprest,
One a white lady sighing, "Why am I sad!"
To him who sighed back, "Sad, my Love, am I!"
And speechlessly the old moon conned the chamber,
And these two reft of rest.

While their large-pupilled vision swept the scene there,
Nought seeming imminent,
Something fell sheer, and crashed, and from the floor
Lay glittering at the pair with a shattered gaze,
While their large-pupilled vision swept the scene there,
And the many-eyed thing outleant.

With a start they saw that it was an old-time pier-glass
Which had stood on the mantel near,
Its silvering blemished,—yes, as if worn away
By the eyes of the countless dead who had smirked at it
Ere these two ever knew that old-time pier-glass
And its vague and vacant leer.

As he looked, his bride like a moth skimmed forth, and kneelin
Quick, with quivering sighs,
Gathered the pieces under the moon's sly ray,
Unwitting as an automaton what she did;
Till he entreated, hasting to where she was kneeling,
"Let it stay where it lies!"

"Long years of sorrow this means!" breathed the lady
As they retired. "Alas!"
And she lifted one pale hand across her eyes.
"Don't trouble, Love; it's nothing," the bridegroom said.
"Long years of sorrow for us!" murmured the lady,
"Or ever this evil pass!"

And the Spirits Ironic laughed behind the wainscot,
    And the Spirits of Pity sighed.
  "It's good," said the Spirits Ironic, "to tickle their minds
  With a portent of their wedlock's aftergrinds."
And the Spirits of Pity sighed behind the wainscot,
    "It's a portent we cannot abide!

"More, what shall happen to prove the truth of the portent?"
    —"Oh; in brief, they will fade till old,
  And their loves grow numbed ere death, by the cark of care."
  —"But nought see we that asks for portents there?—
'Tis the lot of all."—"Well, no less true is a portent
    That it fits all mortal mould."

THE ROBIN

WHEN up aloft
I fly and fly,
I see in pools
The shining sky,
And a happy bird
Am I, am I!

When I descend
Towards their brink
I stand, and look,
And stoop, and drink,
And bathe my wings,
And chink and prink.

When winter frost
Makes earth as steel
I search and search
But find no meal,
And most unhappy
Then I feel.

But when it lasts,
And snows still fall,
I get to feel
No grief at all,
For I turn to a cold stiff
Feathery ball!

"I ROSE AND WENT TO ROU'TOR TOWN"

(*She, alone*)

I ROSE and went to Rou'tor Town
With gaiety and good heart,
And ardour for the start,
That morning ere the moon was down
That lit me off to Rou'tor Town
With gaiety and good heart.

When sojourn soon at Rou'tor Town
Wrote sorrows on my face,
I strove that none should trace
The pale and gray, once pink and brown,
When sojourn soon at Rou'tor Town
Wrote sorrows on my face.

The evil wrought at Rou'tor Town
On him I'd loved so true
I cannot tell anew:
But nought can quench, but nought can drown
The evil wrought at Rou'tor Town
On him I'd loved so true!

THE NETTLES

THIS, then, is the grave of my son,
Whose heart she won! And nettles grow
Upon his mound; and she lives just below.

How he upbraided me, and left,
And our lives were cleft, because I said
She was hard, unfeeling, caring but to wed.

Well, to see this sight I have fared these miles,
And her firelight smiles from her window there,
Whom he left his mother to cherish with tender care!

It is enough. I'll turn and go;
Yes, nettles grow where lone lies he,
Who spurned me for seeing what he could not see.

IN A WAITING-ROOM

ON a morning sick as the day of doom
With the drizzling gray
Of an English May,
There were few in the railway waiting-room.
About its walls were framed and varnished
Pictures of liners, fly-blown, tarnished.
The table bore a Testament
For travellers' reading, if suchwise bent.

I read it on and on,
And, thronging the Gospel of Saint John,
Were figures—additions, multiplications—
By some one scrawled, with sundry emendations;
Not scoffingly designed,
But with an absent mind,—
Plainly a bagman's counts of cost,
What he had profited, what lost;
And whilst I wondered if there could have been
Any particle of a soul
In that poor man at all,
To cypher rates of wage
Upon that printed page,
There joined in the charmless scene
And stood over me and the scribbled book
(To lend the hour's mean hue
A smear of tragedy too)
A soldier and wife, with haggard look
Subdued to stone by strong endeavour;
And then I heard
From a casual word
They were parting as they believed for ever.

But next there came
Like the eastern flame
Of some high altar, children—a pair—
Who laughed at the fly-blown pictures there.
"Here are the lovely ships that we,
Mother, are by and by going to see!
When we get there it's 'most sure to be fine,
And the band will play, and the sun will shine!"

It rained on the skylight with a din
As we waited and still no train came in;
But the words of the child in the squalid room
Had spread a glory through the gloom.

THE CLOCK-WINDER

It is dark as a cave,
Or a vault in the nave
When the iron door
Is closed, and the floor
Of the church relaid
With trowel and spade.

But the parish-clerk
Cares not for the dark
As he winds in the tower
At a regular hour
The rheumatic clock
Whose dilatory knock
You can hear when praying
At the day's decaying,
Or at any lone while
From a pew in the aisle.

Up, up from the ground
Around and around
In the turret stair
He clambers, to where
The wheelwork is,
With its tick, click, whizz,
Reposefully measuring
Each day to its end
That mortal men spend
In sorrowing and pleasuring.
Nightly thus does he climb
To the trackway of Time.

Him I followed one night
To this place without light,
And, ere I spoke, heard

Him say, word by word,
At the end of his winding,
The darkness unminding :—

"So I wipe out one more,
My Dear, of the sore
Sad days that still be,
Like a drying Dead Sea,
Between you and me!"

Who she was no man knew:
He had long borne him blind
To all womankind;
And was ever one who
Kept his past out of view.

OLD EXCURSIONS

"WHAT'S the good of going to Ridgeway,
Cerne, or Sydling Mill,
Or to Yell'ham Hill,
Blithely bearing Casterbridge-way
As we used to do?
She will no more climb up there,
Or be visible anywhere
In those haunts we knew."

But to-night, while walking weary,
Near me seemed her shade,
Come as 'twere to upbraid
This my mood in deeming dreary
Scenes that used to please;
And, if she did come to me,
Still solicitous, there may be
Good in going to these.

So, I'll care to roam to Ridgeway,
Cerne, or Sydling Mill,
Or to Yell'ham Hill,
Blithely bearing Casterbridge-way
As we used to do,

Since her phasm may flit out there,
And may greet me anywhere
In those haunts we knew.

April 1913.

THE MASKED FACE

I FOUND me in a great surging space,
At either end a door,
And I said: "What is this giddying place,
With no firm-fixéd floor,
That I knew not of before?"
"It is Life," said a mask-clad face.

I asked: "But how do I come here,
Who never wished to come;
Can the light and air be made more clear,
The floor more quietsome,
And the doors set wide? They numb
Fast-locked, and fill with fear."

The mask put on a bleak smile then,
And said, "O vassal-wight,
There once complained a goosequill pen
To the scribe of the Infinite
Of the words it had to write
Because they were past its ken."

IN A WHISPERING GALLERY

THAT whisper takes the voice
Of a Spirit, speaking to me,
Close, but invisible,
And throws me under a spell
At the kindling vision it brings;
And for a moment I rejoice,
And believe in transcendent things
That would mould from this muddy earth
A spot for the splendid birth

Of everlasting lives,
Whereto no night arrives;
And this gaunt gray gallery
A tabernacle of worth
On this drab-aired afternoon,
When you can barely see
Across its hazed lacune
If opposite aught there be
Of fleshed humanity
Wherewith I may commune;
Or if the voice so near
Be a soul's voice floating here.

THE SOMETHING THAT SAVED HIM

It was when
Whirls of thick waters laved me
Again and again,
That something arose and saved me;
Yea, it was then.

In that day
Unseeing the azure went I
On my way,
And to white winter bent I,
Knowing no May.

Reft of renown,
Under the night clouds beating
Up and down,
In my needfulness greeting
Cit and clown.

Long there had been
Much of a murky colour
In the scene,
Dull prospects meeting duller;
Nought between.

Last, there loomed
A closing-in blind alley,

Though there boomed
A feeble summons to rally
Where it gloomed.

The clock rang;
The hour brought a hand to deliver;
I upsprang,
And looked back at den, ditch and river,
And sang.

THE ENEMY'S PORTRAIT

HE saw the portrait of his enemy, offered
At auction in a street he journeyed nigh,
That enemy, now late dead, who in his lifetime
Had injured deeply him the passer-by.
"To get that picture, pleased be God, I'll try,
And utterly destroy it; and no more
Shall be inflicted on man's mortal eye
A countenance so sinister and sore!"

And so he bought the painting. Driving homeward,
"The frame will come in useful," he declared,
"The rest is fuel." On his arrival, weary,
Asked what he bore with him, and how he fared,
He said he had bid for a picture, though he cared
For the frame only: on the morrow he
Would burn the canvas, which could well be spared,
Seeing that it portrayed his enemy.

Next day some other duty found him busy:
The foe was laid his face against the wall;
But on the next he set himself to loosen
The straining-strips. And then a casual call
Prevented his proceeding therewithal;
And thus the picture waited, day by day,
Its owner's pleasure, like a wretched thrall,
Until a month and more had slipped away.

And then upon a morn he found it shifted,
Hung in a corner by a servitor.

"Why did you take on you to hang that picture?
You know it was the frame I bought it for."
"It stood in the way of every visitor,
And I just hitched it there."—"Well, it must go:
I don't commemorate men whom I abhor.
Remind me 'tis to do. The frame I'll stow."

But things become forgotten. In the shadow
Of the dark corner hung it by its string,
And there it stayed—once noticed by its owner,
Who said, "Ah me—I must destroy that thing!"
But when he died, there, none remembering,
It hung, till moved to prominence, as one sees;
And comers pause and say, examining,
"I thought they were the bitterest enemies?"

IMAGININGS

SHE saw herself a lady
With fifty frocks in wear,
And rolling wheels, and rooms the best,
And faithful maidens' care,
And open lawns and shady
For weathers warm or drear.

She found herself a striver,
All liberal gifts debarred,
With days of gloom, and movements stressed,
And early visions marred,
And got no man to wive her
But one whose lot was hard.

Yet in the moony night-time
She steals to stile and lea
During his heavy slumberous rest
When homecome wearily,
And dreams of some blest bright-time
She knows can never be.

ON THE DOORSTEP

THE rain imprinted the step's wet shine
With target-circles that quivered and crossed
As I was leaving this porch of mine;
When from within there swelled and paused
A song's sweet note;
And back I turned, and thought,
"Here I'll abide."

The step shines wet beneath the rain,
Which prints its circles as heretofore;
I watch them from the porch again,
But no song-notes within the door
Now call to me
To shun the dripping lea;
And forth I stride.

Jan. 1914.

SIGNS AND TOKENS

SAID the red-cloaked crone
In a whispered moan:

"The dead man was limp
When laid in his chest;
Yea, limp; and why
But to signify
That the grave will crimp
Ere next year's sun
Yet another one
Of those in that house—
It may be the best—
For its endless drowse!"

Said the brown-shawled dame
To confirm the same:

"And the slothful flies
On the rotting fruit

Have been seen to wear
While crawling there
Crape scarves, by eyes
That were quick and acute;
As did those that had pitched
On the cows by the pails,
And with flaps of their tails
Were far away switched."

Said the third in plaid,
Each word being weighed:

"And trotting does
In the park, in the lane,
And just outside
The shuttered pane,
Have also been heard—
Quick feet as light
As the feet of a sprite—
And the wise mind knows
What things may betide
When such has occurred."

Cried the black-craped fourth,
Cold faced as the north:

"O, though giving such
Some head-room, I smile
At your falterings
When noting those things
Round your domicile!
For what, what can touch
One whom, riven of all
That makes life gay,
No hints can appal
Of more takings away!"

PATHS OF FORMER TIME

No; no;
It must not be so:
They are the ways we do not go.

Still chew
The kine, and moo
In the meadows we used to wander through;

Still purl
The rivulets and curl
Towards the weirs with a musical swirl;

Haymakers
As in former years
Rake rolls into heaps that the pitchfork rears;

Wheels crack
On the turfy track
The waggon pursues with its toppling pack.

"Why then shun—
Since summer's not done—
All this because of the lack of one?"

Had you been
Sharer of that scene
You would not ask while it bites in keen

Why it is so
We can no more go
By the summer paths we used to know!

1913.

THE CLOCK OF THE YEARS

"A spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up."

And the Spirit said,
"I can make the clock of the years go backward,
But am loth to stop it where you will."
And I cried, "Agreed

To that. Proceed:
It's better than dead!"

He answered, "Peace";
And called her up—as last before me;
Then younger, younger she freshed, to the year
I first had known
Her woman-grown,
And I cried, "Cease!—

"Thus far is good—
It is enough—let her stay thus always!"
But alas for me—He shook his head:
No stop was there;
And she waned child-fair,
And to babyhood.

Still less in mien
To my great sorrow became she slowly,
And smalled till she was nought at all
In his checkless griff;
And it was as if
She had never been.

"Better," I plained,
"She were dead as before! The memory of her
Had lived in me; but it cannot now!"
And coldly his voice:
"It was your choice
To mar the ordained."

1916.

AT THE PIANO

A WOMAN was playing,
A man looking on;
And the mould of her face,
And her neck, and her hair,
Which the rays fell upon
Of the two candles there,
Sent him mentally straying
In some fancy-place
Where pain had no trace.

A cowled Apparition
Came pushing between ;
And her notes seemed to sigh ;
And the lights to burn pale,
As a spell numbed the scene.
But the maid saw no bale,
And the man no monition ;
And Time laughed awry,
And the Phantom hid nigh.

THE SHADOW ON THE STONE

I WENT by the Druid stone
That broods in the garden white and lone,
And I stopped and looked at the shifting shadows
That at some moments there are thrown
From the tree hard by with a rhythmic swing,
And they shaped in my imagining
To the shade that a well-known head and shoulders
Threw there when she was gardening.

I thought her behind my back,
Yea, her I long had learned to lack,
And I said : " I am sure you are standing behind me,
Though how do you get into this old track ? "
And there was no sound but the fall of a leaf
As a sad response ; and to keep down grief
I would not turn my head to discover
That there was nothing in my belief.

Yet I wanted to look and see
That nobody stood at the back of me ;
But I thought once more : " Nay, I'll not unvision
A shape which, somehow, there may be."
So I went on softly from the glade,
And left her behind me throwing her shade,
As she were indeed an apparition—
My head unturned lest my dream should fade.

Begun 1913 : *finished* 1916.

IN THE GARDEN

(M. H.)

WE waited for the sun
To break its cloudy prison
(For day was not yet done,
And night still unbegun)
Leaning by the dial.

After many a trial—
We all silent there—
It burst as new-arisen,
Throwing a shade to where
Time travelled at that minute.

Little saw we in it,
But this much I know,
Of lookers on that shade,
Her towards whom it made
Soonest had to go.

1915.

THE TREE AND THE LADY

I HAVE done all I could
For that lady I knew! Through the heats I have shaded her,
Drawn to her songsters when summer has jaded her,
Home from the heath or the wood.

At the mirth-time of May,
When my shadow first lured her, I'd donned my new bravery
Of greenth: 'twas my all. Now I shiver in slavery,
Icicles grieving me gray.

Plumed to every twig's end
I could tempt her chair under me. Much did I treasure her
During those days she had nothing to pleasure her;
Mutely she used me as friend.

I'm a skeleton now,
And she's gone, craving warmth. The rime sticks like a skin to me;
Through me Arcturus peers; Nor'lights shoot into me;
Gone is she, scorning my bough!

AN UPBRAIDING

Now I am dead you sing to me
The songs we used to know,
But while I lived you had no wish
Or care for doing so.

Now I am dead you come to me
In the moonlight, comfortless;
Ah, what would I have given alive
To win such tenderness!

When you are dead, and stand to me
Not differenced, as now,
But like again, will you be cold
As when we lived, or how?

THE YOUNG GLASS-STAINER

"These Gothic windows, how they wear me out
With cusp and foil, and nothing straight or square,
Crude colours, leaden borders roundabout,
And fitting in Peter here, and Matthew there!

"What a vocation! Here do I draw now
The abnormal, loving the Hellenic norm;
Martha I paint, and dream of Hera's brow,
Mary, and think of Aphrodite's form."

Nov. 1893.

LOOKING AT A PICTURE ON AN ANNIVERSARY

BUT don't you know it, my dear,
Don't you know it,
That this day of the year
(What rainbow-rays embow it!)
We met, strangers confessed,
But parted—blest?

Though at this query, my dear,
There in your frame
Unmoved you still appear,
You must be thinking the same,
But keep that look demure
Just to allure.

And now at length a trace
I surely vision
Upon that wistful face
Of old-time recognition,
Smiling forth, "Yes, as you say,
It is the day."

For this one phase of you
Now left on earth
This great date must endue
With pulsings of rebirth?—
I see them vitalize
Those two deep eyes!

But if this face I con
Does not declare
Consciousness living on
Still in it, little I care
To live myself, my dear,
Lone-labouring here!

Spring 1913.

THE CHOIRMASTER'S BURIAL

He often would ask us
That, when he died,
After playing so many
To their last rest,
If out of us any
Should here abide,
And it would not task us,
We would with our lutes
Play over him
By his grave-brim
The psalm he liked best—
The one whose sense suits
"Mount Ephraim"—
And perhaps we should seem
To him, in Death's dream,
Like the seraphim.

As soon as I knew
That his spirit was gone
I thought this his due,
And spoke thereupon.
"I think," said the vicar,
"A read service quicker
Than viols out-of-doors
In these frosts and hoars.
That old-fashioned way
Requires a fine day,
And it seems to me
It had better not be."

Hence, that afternoon,
Though never knew he
That his wish could not be,
To get through it faster
They buried the master
Without any tune.

But 'twas said that, when
At the dead of next night

The vicar looked out,
There struck on his ken
Thronged roundabout,
Where the frost was graying
The headstoned grass,
A band all in white
Like the saints in church-glass,
Singing and playing
The ancient stave
By the choirmaster's grave.

Such the tenor man told
When he had grown old.

THE MAN WHO FORGOT

At a lonely cross where bye-roads met
I sat upon a gate;
I saw the sun decline and set,
And still was fain to wait.

A trotting boy passed up the way
And roused me from my thought;
I called to him, and showed where lay
A spot I shyly sought.

"A summer-house fair stands hidden where
You see the moonlight thrown;
Go, tell me if within it there
A lady sits alone.'

He half demurred, but took the track,
And silence held the scene;
I saw his figure rambling back;
I asked him if he had been.

"I went just where you said, but found
No summer-house was there:
Beyond the slope 'tis all bare ground;
Nothing stands anywhere.

"A man asked what my brains were worth;
The house, he said, grew rotten,
And was pulled down before my birth,
And is almost forgotten!"

My right mind woke, and I stood dumb;
Forty years' frost and flower
Had fleeted since I'd used to come
To meet her in that bower.

WHILE DRAWING IN A CHURCHYARD

"It is sad that so many of worth,
Still in the flesh," soughed the yew,
"Misjudge their lot whom kindly earth
Secludes from view.

"They ride their diurnal round
Each day-span's sum of hours
In peerless ease, without jolt or bound
Or ache like ours.

"If the living could but hear
What is heard by my roots as they creep
Round the restful flock, and the things said there
No one would weep."

"'Now set among the wise,'
They say: 'Enlarged in scope,
That no god trumpet us to rise
We truly hope.'"

I listened to his strange tale
In the mood that stillness brings,
And I grew to accept as the day wore pale
That show of things.

"FOR LIFE I HAD NEVER CARED GREATLY"

For Life I had never cared greatly,
As worth a man's while;
Peradventures unsought,
Peradventures that finished in nought,
Had kept me from youth and through manhood till lately
Unwon by its style.

In earliest years—why I know not—
I viewed it askance;
Conditions of doubt,
Conditions that leaked slowly out,
May haply have bent me to stand and to show not
Much zest for its dance.

With symphonies soft and sweet colour
It courted me then,
Till evasions seemed wrong,
Till evasions gave in to its song,
And I warmed, until living aloofly loomed duller
Than life among men.

Anew I found nought to set eyes on,
When, lifting its hand,
It uncloaked a star,
Uncloaked it from fog-damps afar,
And showed its beams burning from pole to horizon
As bright as a brand.

And so, the rough highway forgetting,
I pace hill and dale
Regarding the sky,
Regarding the vision on high,
And thus re-illumed have no humour for letting
My pilgrimage fail.

POEMS OF WAR AND PATRIOTISM

"MEN WHO MARCH AWAY"

(SONG OF THE SOLDIERS)

WHAT of the faith and fire within us
        Men who march away
        Ere the barn-cocks say
        Night is growing gray,
Leaving all that here can win us;
What of the faith and fire within us
        Men who march away?

Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
        Friend with the musing eye,
        Who watch us stepping by
        With doubt and dolorous sigh?
Can much pondering so hoodwink you!
Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
        Friend with the musing eye?

Nay. We well see what we are doing,
        Though some may not see—
        Dalliers as they be—
        England's need are we;
Her distress would leave us rueing:
Nay. We well see what we are doing,
        Though some may not see!

In our heart of hearts believing
        Victory crowns the just,
        And that braggarts must
        Surely bite the dust,

Press we to the field ungrieving,
In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just.

Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say
Night is growing gray,
Leaving all that here can win us;
Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away.

September 5, 1914.

HIS COUNTRY

I JOURNEYED from my native spot
Across the south sea shine,
And found that people in hall and cot
Laboured and suffered each his lot
Even as I did mine.

He travels southward, and looks around;

Thus noting them in meads and marts
It did not seem to me
That my dear country with its hearts,
Minds, yearnings, worse and better parts
Had ended with the sea.

and cannot discover the boundary

I further and further went anon,
As such I still surveyed,
And further yet—yea, on and on,
And all the men I looked upon
Had heart-strings fellow-made.

of his native country;

I traced the whole terrestrial round,
Homing the other side;
Then said I, "What is there to bound
My denizenship? It seems I have found
Its scope to be world-wide."

or where his duties to his fellow-creatures end;

nor who are his enemies.

I asked me: "Whom have I to fight,
And whom have I to dare,
And whom to weaken, crush, and blight?
My country seems to have kept in sight
On my way everywhere."

1913.

ENGLAND TO GERMANY IN 1914

"O ENGLAND, may God punish thee!"
—Is it that Teuton genius flowers
Only to breathe malignity
Upon its friend of earlier hours?
—We have eaten your bread, you have eaten ours,
We have loved your burgs, your pines' green moan,
Fair Rhine-stream, and its storied towers;
Your shining souls of deathless dowers
Have won us as they were our own:

We have nursed no dreams to shed your blood,
We have matched your might not rancorously
Save a flushed few whose blatant mood
You heard and marked as well as we
To tongue not in their country's key;
But yet you cry with face aflame,
"O England, may God punish thee!"
And foul in onward history,
And present sight, your ancient name.

Autumn 1914.

ON THE BELGIAN EXPATRIATION

I DREAMT that people from the Land of Chimes
Arrived one autumn morning with their bells,
To hoist them on the towers and citadels
Of my own country, that the musical rhymes

Rung by them into space at meted times
Amid the market's daily stir and stress,

And the night's empty star-lit silentness,
Might solace souls of this and kindred climes.

Then I awoke; and lo, before me stood
The visioned ones, but pale and full of fear;
From Bruges they came, and Antwerp, and Ostend,

No carillons in their train. Foes of mad mood
Had shattered these to shards amid the gear
Of ravaged roof, and smouldering gable-end.

October 18, 1914.

AN APPEAL TO AMERICA ON BEHALF OF THE BELGIAN DESTITUTE

Seven millions stand
Emaciate, in that ancient Delta-land:—
We here, full-charged with our own maimed and dead
And coiled in throbbing conflicts slow and sore,
Can poorly soothe these ails unmerited
Of souls forlorn upon the facing shore!—
Where naked, gaunt, in endless band on band
Seven millions stand.

No man can say
To your great country that, with scant delay,
You must, perforce, ease them in their loud need:
We know that nearer first your duty lies;
But—is it much to ask that you let plead
Your lovingkindness with you—wooing-wise—
Albeit that aught you owe, and must repay,
No man can say?

December 1914.

THE PITY OF IT

I walked in loamy Wessex lanes, afar
From rail-track and from highway, and I heard
In field and farmstead many an ancient word
Of local lineage like "Thu bist," "Er war,"

"Ich woll," "Er sholl," and by-talk similar,
Even as they speak who in this month's moon gird
At England's very loins, thereunto spurred
By gangs whose glory threats and slaughters are.

Then seemed a Heart crying: "Whosoever they be
At root and bottom of this, who flung this flame
Between kin folk kin tongued even as are we,

"Sinister, ugly, lurid, be their fame;
May their familiars grow to shun their name,
And their brood perish everlastingly."

April 1915.

IN TIME OF WARS AND TUMULTS

"WOULD that I'd not drawn breath here!" some one said,
"To stalk upon this stage of evil deeds,
Where purposelessly month by month proceeds
A play so sorely shaped and blood-bespread."

Yet had his spark not quickened, but lain dead
To the gross spectacles of this our day,
And never put on the proffered cloak of clay,
He had but known not things now manifested;

Life would have swirled the same. Morns would have dawned
On the uprooting by the night-gun's stroke
Of what the yester noonshine brought to flower;

Brown martial brows in dying throes have wanned
Despite his absence; hearts no fewer been broke
By Empery's insatiate lust of power.

1915.

IN TIME OF "THE BREAKING OF NATIONS"[1]

I

ONLY a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.

1915.

CRY OF THE HOMELESS

AFTER THE PRUSSIAN INVASION OF BELGIUM

"INSTIGATOR of the ruin—
Whichsoever thou mayst be
Of the masterful of Europe
That contrived our misery—
Hear the wormwood-worded greeting
From each city, shore, and lea
Of thy victims:
"Conqueror, all hail to thee!"

[1] Jer. li. 20.

"Yea: 'All hail!' we grimly shout thee
  That wast author, fount, and head
Of these wounds, whoever proven
  When our times are throughly read.
'May thy loved be slighted, blighted,
  And forsaken,' be it said
    By thy victims,
  'And thy children beg their bread!'

"Nay: a richer malediction!—
  Rather let this thing befall
In time's hurling and unfurling
  On the night when comes thy call;
That compassion dew thy pillow
  And absorb thy senses all
    For thy victims,
  Till death dark thee with his pall."

August 1915.

BEFORE MARCHING AND AFTER

(*In Memoriam F. W. G.*)

ORION swung southward aslant
  Where the starved Egdon pine-trees had thinned,
The Pleiads aloft seemed to pant
  With the heather that twitched in the wind;
But he looked on indifferent to sights such as these,
Unswayed by love, friendship, home joy or home sorrow,
And wondered to what he would march on the morrow.

The crazed household-clock with its whirr
  Rang midnight within as he stood,
He heard the low sighing of her
  Who had striven from his birth for his good;
But he still only asked the spring starlight, the breeze,
What great thing or small thing his history would borrow
From that Game with Death he would play on the morrow.

When the heath wore the robe of late summer,
  And the fuchsia-bells, hot in the sun,

Hung red by the door, a quick comer
Brought tidings that marching was done
For him who had joined in that game over-seas
Where Death stood to win, though his name was to borrow
A brightness therefrom not to fade on the morrow.

September 1915.

"OFTEN WHEN WARRING"

OFTEN when warring for he wist not what,
An enemy-soldier, passing by one weak,
Has tendered water, wiped the burning cheek,
And cooled the lips so black and clammed and hot;

Then gone his way, and maybe quite forgot
The deed of grace amid the roar and reek;
Yet larger vision than the tongue can speak
He there has reached, although he has known it not

For natural mindsight, triumphing in the act
Over the throes of artificial rage,
Has thuswise muffled victory's peal of pride,
Rended to ribands policy's specious page
That deals but with evasion, code, and pact,
And war's apology wholly stultified.

1915.

THEN AND NOW

WHEN battles were fought
With a chivalrous sense of Should and Ought,
In spirit men said,
"End we quick or dead,
Honour is some reward!
Let us fight fair—for our own best or worst;
So, Gentlemen of the Guard,
Fire first!"

In the open they stood,
Man to man in his knighthood:

They would not deign
To profit by a stain
On the honourable rules,
Knowing that practise perfidy no man durst
Who in the heroic schools
Was nurst.

But now, behold, what
Is warfare wherein honour is not!
Rama laments
Its dead innocents:
Herod breathes: "Sly slaughter
Shall rule! Let us, by modes once called accurst,
Overhead, under-water,
Stab first."

1915.

A CALL TO NATIONAL SERVICE

Up and be doing, all who have a hand
To lift, a back to bend. It must not be
In times like these that vaguely linger we
To air our vaunts and hopes; and leave our land

Untended as a wild of weeds and sand.
—Say, then, "I come!" and go, O women and men
Of palace, ploughshare, easel, counter, pen;
That scareless, scathless, England still may stand.

Would years but let me stir as once I stirred
At many a dawn to take the forward track,
And with a stride plunged on to enterprize,

I now would speed like yester wind that whirred
Through yielding pines; and serve with never a slack,
So loud for promptness all around outcries!

March 1917.

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING ONE

THE dead woman lay in her first night's grave,
And twilight fell from the clouds' concave,
And those she had asked to forgive forgave.

The woman passing came to a pause
By the heaped white shapes of wreath and cross,
And looked upon where the other was.

And as she mused there thus spoke she:
"Never your countenance did I see,
But you've been a good good friend to me!"

Came a plaintive voice from the sod below:
"O woman whose accents I do not know,
What is it that makes you approve me so?"

"O dead one, ere my soldier went,
I heard him saying, with warm intent,
To his friend, when won by your blandishment:

"'I would change for that lass here and now!
And if I return I may break my vow
To my present Love, and contrive somehow

"'To call my own this new-found pearl,
Whose eyes have the light, whose lips the curl
I always have looked for in a girl!'

"—And this is why that by ceasing to be—
Though never your countenance did I see—
You prove you a good good friend to me;

"And I pray each hour for your soul's repose
In gratitude for your joining those
No lover will clasp when his campaigns close."

Away she turned, when arose to her eye
A martial phantom of gory dye,
That said, with a thin and far-off sigh:

"O sweetheart, neither shall I clasp you!
For the foe this day has pierced me through,
And sent me to where she is. Adieu!—

"And forget not when the night-wind's whine
Calls over this turf where her limbs recline,
That it travels on to lament by mine."

There was a cry by the white-flowered mound,
There was a laugh from underground,
There was a deeper gloom around.

1915.

A NEW YEAR'S EVE IN WAR TIME

I

PHANTASMAL fears,
And the flap of the flame,
And the throb of the clock,
And a loosened slate,
And the blind night's drone,
Which tiredly the spectral pines intone!

II

And the blood in my ears
Strumming always the same,
And the gable-cock
With its fitful grate,
And myself, alone.

III

The twelfth hour nears
Hand-hid, as in shame;
I undo the lock,
And listen, and wait
For the Young Unknown.

IV

In the dark there careers—
As if Death astride came
To numb all with his knock—
A horse at mad rate
Over rut and stone.

No figure appears,
No call of my name,
No sound but "Tic-toc"
Without check. Past the gate
It clatters—is gone.

VI

What rider it bears
There is none to proclaim ;
And the Old Year has struck,
And, scarce animate.
The New makes moan.

VII

Maybe that "More Tears !—
More Famine and Flame—
More Severance and Shock !"
Is the order from Fate
That the Rider speeds on
To pale Europe ; and tiredly the pines intone.

1915–1916

"I MET A MAN"

I MET a man when night was nigh,
Who said, with shining face and eye
Like Moses' after Sinai :—

"I have seen the Moulder of Monarchies,
Realms, peoples, plains and hills,

Sitting upon the sunlit seas!—
And, as He sat, soliloquies
Fell from Him like an antiphonic breeze
That pricks the waves to thrills.

"Meseemed that of the maimed and dead
Mown down upon the globe,—
Their plenteous blooms of promise shed
Ere fruiting-time—His words were said,
Sitting against the western web of red
Wrapt in His crimson robe.

"And I could catch them now and then:
—'Why let these gambling clans
Of human Cockers, pit liege men
From mart and city, dale and glen,
In death-mains, but to swell and swell again
Their swollen All-Empery plans,

"'When a mere nod (if my malign
Compeer but passive keep)
Would mend that old mistake of mine
I made with Saul, and ever consign
All Lords of War whose sanctuaries enshrine
Liberticide, to sleep?

"'With violence the lands are spread
Even as in Israel's day,
And it repenteth me I bred
Chartered armipotents lust-led
To feuds. . . . Yea, grieves my heart, as then I said,
To see their evil way!'

—"The utterance grew, and flapped like flame,
And further speech I feared;
But no Celestial tongued acclaim,
And no huzzas from earthlings came,
And the heavens mutely masked as 'twere in shame
Till daylight disappeared."

Thus ended he as night rode high-
The man of shining face and eye,
Like Moses' after Sinai.

1916.

"I LOOKED UP FROM MY WRITING"

I LOOKED up from my writing,
  And gave a start to see,
As if rapt in my inditing,
  The moon's full gaze on me.

Her meditative misty head
  Was spectral in its air,
And I involuntarily said,
  "What are you doing there?"

"Oh, I've been scanning pond and hole
  And waterway hereabout
For the body of one with a sunken soul
  Who has put his life-light out.

"Did you hear his frenzied tattle?
  It was sorrow for his son
Who is slain in brutish battle,
  Though he has injured none.

"And now I am curious to look
  Into the blinkered mind
Of one who wants to write a book
  In a world of such a kind."

Her temper overwrought me,
  And I edged to shun her view,
For I felt assured she thought me
  One who should drown him too.

FINALE

THE COMING OF THE END

How it came to an end!
The meeting afar from the crowd,
And the love-looks and laughters unpenned,
The parting when much was avowed,
How it came to an end!

It came to an end;
Yes, the outgazing over the stream,
With the sun on each serpentine bend,
Or, later, the luring moon-gleam;
It came to an end.

It came to an end,
The housebuilding, furnishing, planting,
As if there were ages to spend
In welcoming, feasting, and jaunting;
It came to an end.

It came to an end,
That journey of one day a week:
("It always goes on," said a friend,
"Just the same in bright weathers or bleak:")
But it came to an end.

"*How* will come to an end
This orbit so smoothly begun,
Unless some convulsion attend?"
I often said. "What will be done
When it comes to an end?"

Well, it came to an end
Quite silently—stopped without jerk;
Better close no prevision could lend;
Working out as One planned it should work
Ere it came to an end.

AFTERWARDS

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
"He was a man who used to notice such things"?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
"To him this must have been a familiar sight."

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, "He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone."

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
"He was one who had an eye for such mysteries"?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
"He hears it not now, but used to notice such things?"

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